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GEORGE F. UNDERHILL

AUTHOR OF
'BEATEN AT THE FINISH,' 'IN AT THE DEATH,' 'HUNTING AND PRACTICAL HINTS FOR HUNTING MEN,' ETC., ETC.

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CHAPTER I

THE WHEEL OF FORTUNE

IT was the morning on which Mr Reginald Herbert, Barrister-at-Law of the Inner Temple, came of age, and was also supposed by his friends and creditors to come into his kingdom. He had attained his legal majority four years before, but under his father's will, he could not touch his inheritance until he was twenty-five. The late Mr Herbert had been noted in the city for his caution, so that at his death, when Reginald was only fourteen, none of his business acquaintances were surprised that he had extended the arrival of his son to years of discretion, from twenty-one to twenty-five. A few wondered that he had made Major Herbert sole executor and guardian of his son, with what the lawyers would term unlimited discretionary powers. Nor was the wonder dimin-

ished when the Major, who had retired from the service, launched into a far more expensive mode of living than he had previously been accustomed to. But then the Major had never been popular with the city magnates, whom his brother invited to his solid, old-fashioned house in Russell Square. He tolerated them on account of their banking accounts, but he would not have dreamt of asking them to dine with him at his club any more than he would have dreamt of inviting his own valet. Probably in preference he would have invited the valet. Needless to say he was a bachelor.

How the Major fulfilled the trust, which had been reposed in him, may be gathered from the letter, which Reginald was reading in his luxurious chambers in the Temple on the morning of his twenty-fifth birthday. Though long, it was to the point, so we will quote it *in extenso.*

"My dear Reginald,—I should much have liked to have been with you on the day which sees you your own master in the world, but circumstances, which your solicitors will readily understand, make my absence advisable. The truth is, my dear boy, that my incompetence to deal with any money matters outside my betting-book has caused me to be somewhat lax in keeping those accounts, which the law absurdly considers a guardian ought to

keep in regard to the money of his ward. I took a broader view of our relationship, and considered it my duty to make you a gentleman and a sportsman by superintending your associations in boyhood, and by introducing you into the best society afterwards. For this reason I rented our little hunting box in Leicestershire, and saw that you were provided with good hunters. I finished your riding education, and taught you how to dress. (Don't forget that little trick of tying the bow beneath the knee.) Since you left school and came to London, I have made your career in society my special study, and in justice I must say that you have proved a credit to me. You chose a profession, a deuced gentlemanly profession, of which I hope you are an ornament, as you won the Bar Light-Weight Point-to-Point race this spring. I have never restricted you in money, but, on the contrary, have even increased my own expenditure, so that we both might make that appearance in Society, which commands its respect. In short, I have placed you in an excellent social position, which is better than if I had placed you in a respectable financial position. I have warned you both by example and precept against the vulgarity inseparable from attention to the details of business, except when you are on a racecourse or at Tattersall's. But your education has been expensive. Your

estimable father, whom I could never persuade to go to my own tailor, left some eighty thousand pounds behind him—a big sum for Russell Square, but a mere income in the West End—so that in bringing your education to my own standard of perfection, I have been obliged to spend nearly, if not quite all, of this amount, besides crippling myself to such an extent that I have been compelled to realise my own small annuity. Do not grieve for me, however. I have no doubt that I shall be able to support existence for the short remainder of my days in some quiet foreign place, far from that madding crowd, in which you, with your natural abilities developed by my tuition, are destined to shine. I did not trouble you before about this reverse of fortune, as it is termed in the city, for it has always been part of my philosophy to postpone the evil day as long as possible. For your future welfare I feel no anxiety, if you will act up to my own principles. One piece of advice I will give you for your immediate benefit, which is, "Do not let the world, especially your creditors, know of your reverse." As my present to you, I give you everything that I have left behind at my rooms in the Albany, as well as my horses, carriages, and saddlery, both in London and Leicestershire. If you want a valet, you will find Slick invaluable, especially if you change your

abode from the Temple to the Albany, a change which I should recommend, if you do not mean to practise at the Bar. You will find the Leicestershire cellar fairly well stocked as I had another pipe of the '68 port laid down three weeks ago. I will write to you when I am settled.—With best wishes, your affectionate uncle,

JAMES HERBERT."

Reginald had finished a second perusal of this letter when he was disturbed by a loud knocking at the door, and, without waiting for the laundress to announce him, a man of about six or seven and twenty hurried into the room.

"Good luck, Reggie, old chap! Happy returns, hearty congratulations, and all the rest of it!"

"Thanks, Dick. I expected you would come round. You can clear away, Mrs Jaffery, and sport the outer oak when you leave. Come back later to clean up."

The laundress did as she was told, only too glad to get away to spend the gratuity Reggie had given her, and in five minutes the two men were alone.

"What's up, Reggie? I'm dashed if you look like an heir who has come into his fortune."

"I don't feel like one either. Dick, you are the best friend that I've got, and I know you

won't betray my confidence. The truth is, that I've received a nasty back-hander."

"Fortune not so much as you supposed, eh?" queried Richard Pebbles, for such was the name of Reginald's visitor.

"Worse than that; I rather suspect that there is no fortune at all."

Mr Pebbles gave vent to a long whistle.

"It appears that my uncle and I have managed to spend the fortune. Read this letter."

Mr Pebbles, commonly called Dick by his friends, a liberty which we shall take in the future, carefully read the Major's letter.

"Pretty cool," he said, when he had finished it. "What do you mean to do?"

"I must find out the details first, in spite of what my uncle terms the vulgarity of such a proceeding. Then, I suppose, I must put my shoulder to the wheel and do something for a living."

"Bravely spoken, Reggie," Dick replied with more feeling than his ordinary companions would have expected from him. "But the difficulty in this world is how to earn a living. Our profession is highly aristocratic, but it is deuced unremunerative. The only thing to do now is to take this letter to your family lawyers. There may be more salvage out of the fire than you think. I take it that Uncle Major has absconded."

"Not a word against him, Dick. It is he that troubles me more than the loss of the money. He might have trusted me, instead of running away in this fashion."

"He judged you by his own standard. Of course your lawyers will advise you to take proceedings against him."

"Which I shall refuse to do."

"Exactly as I thought. No good comes of washing the dirty linen of the family in public. Still, few nephews would be so forgiving."

"Nonsense! When all's said I've had a high time for the last five years, and the worst you can say of my uncle, is that he had his fling at my expense. Besides, Dick, if I had taken the trouble to think about money matters, I must have seen that we were living far beyond the interest of my fortune. If this affair becomes public property, I shall only be put down as an egregious ass. What are you doing to-day?"

"The same as most days—nothing."

"Then come with me to Lincoln's Inn Fields, and let us interview my family lawyers."

The interview was a long one and decidedly disagreeable to all parties. Mr Miller, the senior partner, had been an intimate friend, as well as the legal adviser, of Reginald's father. He belonged to the school of men, who regard the West

End as a hot-bed of extravagance, and racing as an invention of His Satanic Majesty. In his opinion a spendthrift was worse than a rogue, and to live beyond one's income nothing less than a crime. He had seen little of Reginald since his father's death, for the Major had taken care that he should have nothing to do with his ward's personal property; but he had heard a great deal, and had anticipated the present visit, though he was not prepared for the disclosures made in the Major's letter. Accustomed as he was to keep his feelings under control, he could not at first restrain his anger, and wished to apply for a warrant immediately against the Major. But this Reginald would not hear of, and the suggestion made him in his turn so angry, that the interview would have terminated abruptly, if it had not been for the intervention of Dick Pebbles.

"Come, Mr Miller, we shall never get to business if we talk in this way. Mr Herbert has consulted me as a friend, and not in my professional capacity, or I should not have come here with him. Major Herbert has evidently left the country, and we must find out whether he has left any accounts behind him. I presume he did employ a solicitor?"

"Yes, Boxall of Cockspur Street," Reginald replied.

Mr Miller gave a grunt of disapprobation, as he made a note of the name.

"And this letter, I presume, constitutes a valid deed of gift?" Dick continued.

Mr Miller nodded.

"Then the only question that remains is this: Will you act for Mr Herbert in helping to realise the estate?"

"On one condition, namely, that he consents to be guided by me. I will promise not to take any proceedings against Major Herbert. Whether or not Boxall is implicated, it is impossible to tell at present; but I should say that he was too cunning to allow himself to be caught."

These preliminaries being settled, the three men discussed the details connected with realising Reginald's property. It took some weeks to wind up matters, and the result was quite as disastrous as the Major had led his nephew to anticipate. When everything had been sold down to the last saddle, Reginald was left with only sufficient to bring him in a hundred a year, if judiciously invested.

"Better than nothing at all, my dear boy," Dick Pebbles remarked philosophically, as the two friends were talking over the crisis in Reginald's rooms in the Temple.

"Probably: but not enough to live upon. How-

ever, everything is settled now and I know the worst. The next question, Dick, is, what am I to do to earn a living?"

"Well, Reggie, I must say that you take your loss very calmly. The majority of fellows would do nothing but utter useless lamentations, instead of showing the pluck you've shown. Now, I don't think that the Bar will keep you. I had dreams of the woolsack when I was called, but they were soon dissipated."

"So you took to literature, which, from what you tell me, is as hard to succeed at as law, besides requiring brains. I am afraid, Dick, law and literature are beyond me. I might hire myself out at a guinea a night to dine with African millionaires."

"Too many fellows with handles to their names working that line of business."

"Or get a situation as gamekeeper or whipper-in."

"Many a good fellow has done that before now," Dick replied carelessly. "Still, I don't think it would suit you. Besides, there is no reason why you should commit social suicide."

"Confound Society! It's nothing else but humbug."

Dick shrugged his shoulders, for he knew that Society was a sore point with his friend. Reggie's loss of fortune had soon become public property,

though the Major, in his care that nobody should pluck the young heir except himself, had taken precautions that Reggie's friends should be *sans reproche* according to the standard of modern Society. Yet men, who had been his most cordial companions, became distant acquaintances, and only acknowledged him with a hardly perceptible nod. Women, who had schemed to get him inside their drawing-rooms, did not even send him invitations. When he went to his club, men became deeply interested in their newspapers. He was no longer the guest at a succession of shooting parties, and there was an air of patronage over the little hospitality that was offered to him. Reggie knew that this would happen, but the experience was none the less painful for the anticipation. Of course there were exceptions. Hollow as Society may be, there are plenty of men and women in it, whose frank hearts are not regulated solely by mercenary motives. Dick Pebbles was one of these. He was only a rising young author and could not afford to disregard the conventionalities of Society. But the conventionalities had not perverted his mind. He had stayed in town during the sultry days of August to help and cheer his friend, instead of breathing in the ozone from the sea, which he would never have done if Reggie had come into his fortune.

"What does the worthy Mr Miller advise you to do?"

"He has not suggested anything. He praises what he thinks fit to call my honourable conduct, and seems to consider it wonderful that I should have paid my debts. He promises, if I practise at the Bar, to use his influence on my behalf, though he did not promise that, until I had told him that I had no idea of practising. He said plainly that he took an interest in me for my father's sake, not for my own."

"Well, he was more candid than most lawyers. How about the son?"

"Young Miller! Oh, he is harmless enough. He is dying to get into Society, though, what he would do if he got there, I can't imagine. His father appears to have driven him on the curb all his life, with the result that he would like to kick over the traces. I have promised to take him down to Kempton next week. But we are wandering from the point. Dick, what am I to do?"

"Come and have some lunch with me first. Afterwards we will go down to Richmond and pull up to Teddington and back, and dine at the Star and Garter. Don't shake your head, man! I've dined with you a few hundred times, so you must dine with me for a change. To tell you the

truth, I've been coining money lately, since the House has risen, and the political leader writers and reporters are out of town. During August Fleet Street is a veritable El Dorado for the literary free lance."

Reggie really was only too glad to get away from the heat and dust of London. Nor was it false pride which had made him shake his head, but his earnest desire not to waste a day longer than he could help before, as he expressed it, getting into harness. He had not the Micawber temperament, which allows its possessor to wait for something to turn up. His uncle had often complained of his excessive energy in all field sports, forgetting that an able-bodied, full-blooded man of five-and-twenty does not care to spend his days in lounging between Pall Mall and the Park. The Major probably would have thought his tuition thrown away, if he had seen Reggie sculling vigorously up to Teddington beneath a blazing August sun, while his companion lay lazily smoking in the stern of the boat. Not that Dick Pebbles was by any means constitutionally lazy: but a man, who works till two o'clock in the morning for six days in the week in the editorial room of a newspaper office, is entitled to an occasional indulgence in the *dolce far niente.* So he lay back indolently, admiring Reggie's muscles and wondering what he

could find for him to do. His musings, however, were turned into a different channel by a young man, who passed quickly by them in a racing outrigger, to whom Dick waved his hand.

"Who's your friend?"

"Jack Slatering—Lord Slatering he is now. His testy old uncle died about a month ago, and Jack sprang from comparative poverty into a rich peerage."

"He used to be a good sort. Perhaps wealth may have spoilt him."

"Not much chance of that. He will sober down and become an ornament to the Upper House. You wouldn't think it, but Jack was always a bit of a politician. He would have stood at the last election, if the old peer had not refused to put down the necessary shekels."

"Great Scott!" Reggie laughed, "I thought he cared about nothing but racing and hunting."

"So a good many other people thought besides you. It only shows how one may be mistaken in people. Jack is long-headed, in spite of his seeming recklessness."

When they pulled up at the landing stage at Teddington they found Lord Slatering waiting for them. He was as fine a specimen of manhood at five-and-thirty as one could wish to see, standing six feet in his socks, with broad shoulders and a

deep, powerful chest. His face wore the open expression of a man, who likes to think well of his fellow-creatures, though the firmness of his mouth and chin showed that he was not a man, whom it would be wise to deceive. His fair hair, which had not yet lost its curl, blue eyes, and ruddy complexion were proofs of his pure Saxon blood. The features, if not strictly regular, bore the hall mark of aristocracy, and proved that their owner came of a race accustomed to command, and to be obeyed.

"Never expected to see you on the river at the end of August," Dick said, shaking hands with the new peer.

"I couldn't very well accept any Scotland invitations for one thing, and I've had law work to do in town for another. But what brings you here?"

"Remained in town to work."

"You looked like working when I passed you. I should have said that Herbert was doing the work. However, London in August is not such a bad place after all. In June we should have had a crowd of fellows here; now we are able to get attended to in reasonable time. I've got my trap at Richmond, so can drive you back to-night."

"We shall dine at the Star and Garter."

"So will I, then, if I am not *de trop*. Wait till you are worried morning, noon, and night with the intricacies of the law, and then you will appreciate the society of intelligent athleticism."

"I've gone through the experience," Reggie answered, with a near approach to a sigh. "Nor was it a pleasant one."

Lord Slatering saw that he was on dangerous ground and stammered an incoherent reply. He had heard about Reggie's misfortunes, and admired him for his conduct in regard to them. But he was not the man to force a confidence.

"Well, Pebbles, I suppose you will get away some time in September and be able to put in a few days with me. I shall not have any big shoots this autumn, but just pot at the birds in the old fashion. Fix your own time, for I shall be at Slatering Hall after the first till Christmas. I hope, if you are in the neighbourhood, Herbert, you will look me up. I can promise you fair sport, if you don't mind roughing it in bachelors' quarters."

"I shall be delighted, if I am in the neighbourhood; but I doubt whether I shall be in England. Don't shake your head, Dick. Slatering knows, as everybody in clubland knows, that I am a pauper, and must work for my bread and cheese."

"Can't you work for your bread and cheese in England?"

"What sort of work can I do?"

"Anything and everything that you could do in the colonies or in America, and a good many other things besides. You have influence at home, but what influence have you abroad? Am I not right, Slatering?"

"Perhaps; but Herbert might think it impertinent of me to offer an opinion."

"Not a bit of it. To tell you the truth, with the exception of Dick, you are the only person who has troubled to volunteer an opinion. In fact, my old associates hardly take the trouble to recognise me."

"Which only proves that their recognition is not worth much, so we will leave them out of the conversation. If you really want work, I think I may be able to put something in your way. But I warn you that it will be hard work. I ought to know, for I have been doing it myself for the last month."

"Sculling between Richmond and Teddington?" Reggie asked, with a touch of sarcasm.

"No; acting as my own private secretary."

Dick Pebbles rose hastily.

"I'm going to smoke a pipe at the lock. I'll be

back in half-an-hour," and he strolled away, leaving Lord Slatering and Reggie alone.

Lord Slatering smoked in silence for some moments, thinking how he could propose to Reggie that he should become his private secretary without offending his *amour propre.*

"I suppose it is true that you really want to work?" he asked at last.

"Most decidedly. I must work or starve. The only thing is, I don't know what work I'm fit for."

"Well, you can't know till you try, can you? How would a private secretaryship suit you?"

"I thought one had to know shorthand, typewriting, and all those sorts of things. At least so they say in the advertisements."

"Nonsense. That only refers to city clerks who like the title of private secretary. I am a bad hand at beating about the bush, but I want a private secretary myself, who must have some knowledge of sporting matters. Of course he would live with me as my friend, and have his own private sitting-room at Slatering Hall and in London. He would advise me generally, don't you know, and look after my interests, like a Hunt secretary is supposed to look after the interests of the Hunt. As to salary, I must ask you what your own ideas are."

"It is a case of *quantum meruit*, which would

be very little in my case, though I would do my best."

"A fellow can't do more. Then you accept my offer?"

"Gladly, on one condition. Let me come for a month without any salary! At the end of the month, if I am no use, I can leave, and there will be an end of the matter. If I happen to be of any use, then we can discuss the question of £ s. d."

"A very fair proposition. When can you start?"

"As soon as you like. I have already made arrangements for letting my chambers in the Temple, and shall be homeless in another week."

"Good. Then, can you breakfast with me to-morrow, and we will make a start at once?"

"Certainly."

And so Reginald Herbert, Barrister-at-Law, became private secretary to Lord Slatering. Dick Pebbles congratulated him on tumbling into such a deuced good berth.

"You'll get plenty of racing, hunting, shooting, and fishing, free quarters all the year round, with little to do. I know Slatering well, and a better chap never breathed. However, here he comes, and now for dinner."

As most novelists have conceived it to be their duty to describe a dinner at the Star and Garter,

in the same way as many artists have conceived it to be their duty to depict on canvas the scene from the tèrrace, we propose to omit any description either of the viands, the scenery, the glorious sunset, or the dainty dresses of the feminine surroundings. Indeed, on the present occasion the latter were at a discount. Smart Society was out of town, and the pretenders to smart Society were hiding at Margate, Southend, or in their own back kitchens. Our friends were therefore not harassed by the over-dressed stockbroker with his painted dove, or the glass-in-the-eye young man who spends his father's money in West-End night clubs, and were able to discuss even matters of business without fear of inquisitive ears.

"Then I shall expect you at ten o'clock to-morrow morning," Lord Slatering said, as they parted at Hyde Park corner, as Big Ben was ringing out midnight. *Au revoir.*"

Reggie Herbert went to bed in a more hopeful state of mind than he had known for many weeks. He had been verging on that state of despondency, experienced by many able-bodied, well-educated young men in London, who cannot find work in spite of their anxiety to do it. Now, he had been swept by a tide in the sea of life, and was determined to take it at the flood. It might not lead to fortune as interpreted by South African million-

aires, though Reggie hoped that it might lead to something more than a comfortable competency. But then the majority of us are apt to be over-sanguine at five-and-twenty. Even that irascible, crabbed old rhymester, Pope, wrote, "Hope springs eternal in the human breast."

CHAPTER II

THE SPORTING SECRETARY AND THE UNSPORTSMANLIKE AGENT

SLATERING HALL was not what county historians or antiquarians would call an historic seat, having only been finished in the reign of Queen Anne, and presenting the architectural ugliness of that period. Slatering Castle, the original home of the family, had been destroyed by Cromwell's Ironsides, and all that now remained of it was some ivy-clad ruins, supposed by the local peasantry to be haunted. But as pictures of these ruins have constantly adorned the walls of the Royal Academy, and as accounts of them and all belonging to them can be read in the various county histories, we will not now dwell further on them, beyond saying that they were more than a mile from their modern successor. Nor will we insult our readers by copying the Slatering pedigree out of the Peerage, but introduce them at once into the library at Slatering Hall, where Lord Slatering and Reggie were

discussing business on the first evening of their arrival from London.

"Thank goodness for one thing! My late lamented uncle left his affairs in apple-pie order."

"Wish the deuce mine had!" Reggie muttered to himself.

"So we have nothing to do but to sit down and enjoy ourselves," Slatering continued. "I suppose I shall have to make a tour of visits amongst the tenants, which is more than my avuncular relative ever took the trouble to do."

"You'll have half the county leaving cards before the week is over."

"Bother the county! I wonder if the birds will be plentiful? That bilious-looking estate agent of mine, Newgate, says that they will be, but I don't place much reliance on him."

"You don't seem partial to Newgate."

"No; I'm not. His idea of his duty is to grind down the tenants in the name of his master in order to feather his own nest."

"Anyhow, his accounts are all right."

"They are cooked all right, which is the same thing so far as he is concerned. But I wasn't thinking of the money part of his duties. I haven't the slightest doubt but that he would be down immediately on a tenant who didn't pay his rent at the very hour it was due. Any flinty-hearted

idiot could do that. Still I mean to bestow upon him the noble order of the boot as soon as I conveniently can. Then you and I must perform his duties between us. By the way, Herbert, are you anything of a diplomatist?"

"I can't say. It's another word for a perverter of the truth, isn't it?"

"Much about the same. I mean that we shall have to cajole these tenant-farmers a bit, for I guess they are not keen on sport."

"Shoot foxes, eh?"

"They don't preserve them, at any rate, and there's hardly a farm which isn't thick with wire fencing. I believe the only sporting tenant that I've got is my vicar or chaplain. I must call on him in the morning."

"At the vicarage by the ivy-clad church that we passed just before entering the park?"

"Yes."

"What is the name of your spiritual adviser?"

"The Reverend Timothy Spraggs."

"Hardly a sporting name."

"Perhaps not, but he hunts in spite of episcopal remonstrance. However, you can judge for yourself to-morrow."

What Lord Slatering feared was indeed the truth. Neglected by their landlord, whom they seldom saw, and oppressed by an agent, who turned

a deaf ear to all requests for a reduction of rent, the farmers had grown accustomed to regard sport as the luxury of the rich. As they could not afford to hunt themselves they took care that it should be dangerous for hounds to cross their land. One thing Mr Newgate allowed them to do with impunity. They might kill as much game as they liked. The consequences may be easily imagined. The game was shot, but never preserved. Mr Newgate's larder was always kept well stocked, and for a time the local poulterers had no need to go to market. But the farmers had killed the goose which laid the golden eggs, and game, both fur and feather, became scarcer and scarcer every year. Poachers worked openly, till at last the Slatering coverts were probably the worst stocked in the country. At first the neighbouring landowners had remonstrated with the late lord, but since their remonstrances were unavailing they were obliged to let things take their own course. Mr Spraggs had done his best to stop this wanton destruction, but had been told in language more forcible than polite to mind his own business, and the only result of his interference was that a deadly feud had arisen between the vicar and the agent. This and much more did Lord Slatering learn on the following morning during his visit to the vicarage.

Mr Spraggs was to a certain extent a humorist both by name and nature, but on this occasion he was as serious as the sternest judge who ever sat upon the bench. He was a typical country parson, who believed that rural games did more good than long sermons, but his endeavours had been negatived by the influence of Newgate, of whom everybody seemed to entertain a morbid dread.

"How could my uncle have employed such a man?" Slatering exclaimed, after listening to a list of grievances against the agent.

"Well, my lord, your uncle was a strange man in many respects; and Newgate was too cunning not to know how to humour his fancies. As he seldom went outside the park gates, he relied entirely upon Newgate for information about his property, though in many matters he was a keen man of business."

"Which means that he considered twenty-one shillings ought to make a sovereign."

"Not exactly: but he prided himself on being a just man, and was apt to allow his sense of justice to get the mastery of his generosity. Then he had no sympathy with sport, and did not care what became of the game and the foxes. Whenever I mentioned the subject to him, he would only say, 'Oh, don't worry me about these things, Spraggs,' or, 'Hang it, Spraggs, you seem to think

that sport is of more importance than agriculture.' Besides, I could not well press the point, as he gave me permission to shoot where and when I liked, and it might seem as if I wished him to preserve game for my own amusement. Indeed, I rather suspect that Newgate suggested that that was my motive."

"Confound Newgate! I'll send him about his business this very afternoon."

"He might be a dangerous enemy to you, my lord, I warn you. He can play the game of the unjust steward."

"Well, forewarned is forearmed, but it will be strange if I don't find some way of driving him out of the country. What do you say, Herbert?"

"He must go," Reggie answered determinedly. "As for his influence with the tenants, that remittance of a percentage of their rents which you talked about last night will go a long way towards destroying it. Besides, what can the fellow do?"

"He will sow dissension amongst the tenantry in numerous ways. He will explain away your intended liberality, my lord, and make it look worse, than if you had increased the rents instead of reducing them. He is unscrupulous, revengeful, and crafty, and, moreover, full of a certain kind of courage, which does not allow him to hesitate at anything to gain his end."

"Strong language, Mr Spraggs, and sufficient to make me more resolved than before to get rid of the man. Besides, my friend, Mr Herbert, acts both as my private secretary and as my agent."

"I can only warn you, that you will make this man a relentless enemy."

"Still you would hardly advise me to keep on the scamp as my agent, because he acted badly towards my uncle, and may make himself a nuisance? I am no advocate for dismissing old and faithful servants, but I shall employ whom I choose, and manage my property as I choose. I shall dismiss Newgate this afternoon."

Mr Spraggs could say no more in reply to this firm language, while Lord Slatering continued to make diligent inquiries about the tenantry and peasantry. Reggie meanwhile took copious notes of the replies, so that, when Mr Spraggs insisted on their remaining to luncheon, these two erstwhile idle men about town had derived as much information about the property as the two most experienced estate agents could have done in the time.

"A good morning's work," Slatering remarked, as they walked back to the Hall. "Now for Newgate! He was to be with us at three."

Whatever might have been the misdeeds of the steward (and we are bound to admit that Mr Spraggs had underrated rather than exaggerated

them), his personal appearance was in his favour. In stature he was below rather than above the middle height, but his square shoulders and deep chest denoted unusual strength. His face was clean shaven, except for a narrow short fringe of reddish whisker on each cheek. The features were regular and prepossessing, if we except the mouth, which was cast too much in that mould associated with the most resolute determination to be pleasing. In fact the whole character of the face was that of a stern man who seldom smiled. But the expression was not what is vulgarly called a bad one. It resembled that of an uncompromising politician or grave schoolmaster, a resemblance which was increased by a lofty forehead. Nor was there any expression of low cunning, but, on the contrary, the face denoted high intellectual power and a degree of refinement, rarely met with in men of low birth. His dress was that of an ordinary country gentleman, consisting of a dark tweed cut-away coat and waistcoat, with substantial breeches and gaiters. We need only add that his age was forty-five, in order to complete the portrait of the man whom Lord Slatering found waiting for him on his return from the vicarage.

"You are punctual, Mr Newgate. Will you come into the library with me?"

Lord Slatering led the way, and Mr Newgate and Reggie followed.

"Mr Newgate, short as is the time during which I have been here, I have discovered enough to determine me, that you are not such an agent as I should wish to employ."

"Pardon me, my lord, but I have never asked you to employ me, nor have I ever had the faintest idea of asking you to do so. For your uncle's sake I might have remained here for a few months, if you had invited me to do so. In default of such an invitation, I have nothing to do, but wish your lordship 'good afternoon.'"

"Without waiting to hear, why I have not given the invitation?"

Mr Newgate had moved towards the door, but on hearing the question he turned round.

"I fail to see, my lord, how the reason can interest me; at the same time, I am willing to listen to it, if your lordship will be brief in your explanation."

Lord Slatering bit his lip. His first inclination was to knock Newgate down, and he would probably have done so if the conversation had taken place out of doors. But he remembered the vicar's warning, and, rather to Reggie's surprise, remained outwardly calm.

"The reason is briefly this. Either you under-

stand nothing at all about sport, or you have wilfully misled me in regard to the game and the feelings of my tenants. It is unnecessary to inquire which is the case. The only question now is, how soon can you go?"

"I am prepared to resign my agency this minute. In fact, now that the accounts have been audited, my duties are at an end."

"But you have a house?"

"The lease of one, my lord. There are six years yet to run."

"Then am I to understand, that you intend to remain here as my tenant?"

Newgate bowed acquiescence.

"In other words, sir, you intend to set me at defiance. Very well. You will find that I shall know how to deal with you at the proper time. You may go now."

Newgate left the room and the house without another word; but there was an evil expression on his countenance, which boded no good to the new lord.

CHAPTER III

MENTOR AND TELEMACHUS

MAJOR HERBERT had not left England, though he had thought it wise to live in retirement until he had heard from his solicitor, Boxall, that he was safe from legal proceedings. But instead of feeling any gratitude towards Reggie, he only thought how foolish he had been in making over his property to him, so that he might satisfy their joint creditors. The Major doubted which was the bigger fool, he or his nephew; but the doubt was dispelled, when he heard that Reggie had become confidential secretary to Lord Slatering, and was installed at Slatering Hall on equal social terms with his employer. As Reggie had not even asked Boxall for his uncle's address, no communication had taken place between them, so the Major was living in a state of irritating uncertainty as to what Reggie's feelings towards him really were. Nor had he been able to ascertain the public opinion of clubland. Boxall had given him much

information, but the money-lending solicitor had not the *entrée* to the West-End clubs. In action the Major had proved himself to be a brave officer, but morally he was a coward, and could not face the possible ordeal of being cut by Society. Besides, he had lived with every appearance of wealth, and now he was known to be a pauper. Certainly he had not realised his annuity, and still had five hundred a year, an income which barely sufficed him for pocket money. But the worst part of his downfall was that he had lost *caste*, and he knew it.

He was now staying with a Mr Berkeley Foster, who had what he termed a snug little box, close to the agricultural town of Nalshiffe. By birth and education Berkeley was a gentleman, but he had done nothing but live on his wits for many years, and had developed into a clever scamp. In olden days the Major would not have deigned to accept his hospitality, but now he was glad to have somebody to talk to, though Berkeley made no disguise about calling his guest's conduct by its proper name.

"You played your cards deuced badly," he said one night, when the two men were smoking and drinking brandy and soda. "If a smash was inevitable, you should, at least, have feathered your nest, while you could easily have slipped through

the meshes of the law. Now by making yourself scarce, you have practically given yourself away."

"I don't think so. Nobody knows the truth of the matter except Reggie, and Miller, the solicitor, and Boxall."

"And Lord Slatering, and a host of others. Why, man, your disappearance was the talk of clubland for at least three days."

"Your clubland!" the Major said with a slight sneer.

"Yes, my clubland; and we are not so particular as they are in Pall Mall, though we object to a member being found out. It is a personal insult to our cuteness, so we resent it collectively. Sail as near the wind as you like, but take care never to be wrecked, for it is deuced difficult to get to the surface again."

"You sail close enough to the wind."

"Very," Berkeley replied, as if he had been paid a high compliment. "By the way, has your nephew ever been in love? Seriously in love, I mean."

"Not that I know of, beyond indulging in idle flirtations. He was not the boy to trouble himself much about the fair sex. Why do you ask?"

"You know that Slatering has already got some chasers in training, and that your nephew will

probably ride for him. Now I mean to make some money out of that stable."

"I want money badly."

"H'm! I never knew the man who didn't, and millionaires seem to want it more than anybody else. But you know the proverb, 'Providence helps those who help themselves.' If you want money you must earn it."

The Major looked up sharply. He was not so dense, but that he could see that Berkeley wished him to join his own set, and was trying to destroy what little self-respect he had left. But he failed to see of what use he could be to Berkeley. The latter continued to smoke silently, as if he were working out a deep problem.

"I wish that nephew of yours could be induced to fall in love," he said at last. "I must have information about the Slatering stable, and I see no other way of getting it, than through a woman."

"I presume that you have got a woman in your mind's eye. But suppose that Reggie does not fall in love with her!"

"I must run the risk of that. The lady is handsome, of good family, and a clergyman's daughter to boot."

"Perhaps she might catch Slatering."

"I believe, though I am not certain, that Slatering is booked already."

"In that case, Reggie may have to clear out."

"On the contrary. As an affectionate uncle, you should provide him with a wife. Then he can live out-of-doors instead of indoors. Hang it all! Why, you'll win his life-long gratitude, a reconciliation will take place, and you will find yourself back again in your old place in society."

"A very pleasant, but slightly improbable, tale."

"But not an impossible one. On the contrary, I think that the scheme is eminently practicable. In the first place you must manage to make your peace with your nephew."

"Eh! How am I to do that?"

"The penny post is a useful institution. Write to him to-morrow, giving your address at the Nalshiffe post-office. You are somewhat of a diplomatist at writing a letter, aren't you?"

The Major actually reddened, as he recollected the last letter which he had written to Reggie.

"What then?" he asked.

"My clergyman's daughter happens to live in the Slatering country, and to hunt with the Slatering hounds. Her father is a delightfully innocent old widower, and, on my recommendation, will be pleased to invite you to stay a few days at his vicarage. Now, are you beginning to understand?"

"Not quite. I introduce the lady to Reggie in the hunting-field, and leave her to make the running."

"Exactly. She will know how to make it."

"And she will worm out from him the stable secrets and tell them to you?"

"My dear Herbert, you are much more clear-sighted than when you first came here."

"But do you really intend that Reggie should marry this girl?"

"I am afraid that will be for the lady to decide."

"But in any case she will give you the stable information which you will share with me, eh?"

"Yes. You could get the information yourself, if I didn't. But it is you who are over-sanguine now. Don't count your chickens before they are hatched. We must first see your nephew's reply to your letter. He may not recognise the Christian duty of forgiveness, in which case we must adopt other plans. The night is still young, so we might as well draft your apology now."

The letter took some difficulty to concoct, and it was late before the Major and Berkeley had concluded a draft which was satisfactory to both of them. Berkeley was not the man to allow the grass to grow under his feet, and would not hear

of the Major retiring to his bedroom until he had fair copied the draft, which was this:—

"THE POST OFFICE, NALSHIFFE.

"MY DEAR REGINALD,—I am delighted to hear that you are private secretary to Lord Slatering, and I offer you my most sincere congratulations. Ah! my dear boy, what a blessing is youth! You, after our sad reverse, were enabled to make use of your natural energy, and to find honourable employment. I, in my old age, after serving my country for many long years, must hide my grey hairs in a little village far from the madding crowd, and deny myself even the little comforts, to which I have always been accustomed. But I do not complain. I, as the elder, ought to have checked our extravagance, instead of encouraging it. The world will say, and doubtless has said, that I did you an irrevocable injury, and that I deserve punishment. My dear boy, I am punished, for I am a broken-hearted old man, with little left to live for. Sometimes I have even thought of the coward's resource and meditated suicide; but I am thankful that I have withstood the temptation. Yet I hardly know if I could withstand it, if you refuse what will probably be my last request. I wish to see you and to ask your forgiveness. Let me know that you will not spurn me, and I will

arrange for our meeting.—Your distressed but affectionate uncle, JAMES HERBERT."

"That ought to work the oracle," Berkeley said, as he pocketed the letter. "And I tell you what, my friend, you will look distressed, if you punish the brandy so much. I am afraid you will have to take half-a-dozen bottles in your portmanteau, when you go to the vicarage. Did you always drink like this?"

"No; I was always abstemious before my reverse."

"Then I should advise you to remain so. I once knew a man betray one of the finest frauds ever planned upon the turf in a fit of delirium tremens. Be warned in time, for you are deuced shaky now."

The Major said nothing, but walked off to bed, feeling like a schoolboy who has been flogged.

Berkeley Foster remained behind to enjoy a last cigar in the company of his own thoughts. First he regarded his own handsome features in the mirror. "H'm," he muttered, "hair turning grey, and crow's-feet coming about the eyes. I've had my chances in my day, too, but nobody could accuse me of being a matrimonial adventurer. I might be, if I had my time over again. Certainly

the matrimonial business is less trouble than the racing business, though there's not so much sport in it. Now, I wonder what I can make of this blithering old major?"

He sank back in an armchair, and lit a cigar.

"In the first place, this reverse, as he is pleased to call it, has completely unnerved him and driven him to the bottle. That is awkward, for one can never trust a drunkard. But why should he be unnerved? He must have known for years that the blow would fall. Well, he is lucky not to have been prosecuted, and, I suppose, the nephew will let bygones be bygones. Now, if Maud Lister and her father act their parts, I shall get the exclusive information of the Slatering stable, and practically have the management of it. I have no fear of old Lister,—his very innocence prevents him from making a mistake. But Maud has a temper and ambition. I shouldn't wonder, if she were to run for the Lady Slatering stakes. Well, if she won, it might be better for me." Then Berkeley went to bed.

Green Lodge, as Berkeley Foster's hunting-box was called, was as pretty a bachelor's box as one could wish to see, with its gabled roof and ivy-covered walls. Not that Berkeley troubled himself much about the picturesque. He had bought the place cheap, because it had extensive stabling, and

he could rent as much pasture as he wanted. Besides, it was close to a famous training stable, and in the centre of a good hunting country. Here Berkeley played the part of a sporting bachelor with a small independence, and, as he took good care to keep his racing tastes in the background, he was rather popular than otherwise in the county society. A man who rides well to hounds, is a good shot, and is well bred, is sure to get on in the country. Berkeley was all of these, and, though he had a local reputation of being a confirmed bachelor, he would go out of his way to make himself pleasant to ladies. Stories, of course, did find their way down from London, which were hardly to our friend's credit, but Berkeley would hint that the originator of the story had been a loser.

"I bet very seldom and in very small amounts," he would say with a deprecating air. "But I am fairly successful, and winners are always open to jealousy. When I hear a man calumniated, I invariably discover that the calumniator has been a loser."

He owned to doing a little gentlemanly horse-dealing, "just to enable me to get an extra day a week with hounds," he explained. But to such an extent had he imposed upon his neighbours, that even Mr Lowton, the most reserved of trainers, gave him a greater share of his confidence than

he gave to anybody else. Then to watch Berkeley repeating the responses at the parish church of Nalshiffe on Sunday mornings was a sight to make the angels weep tears of joy.

He was habitually an early riser, and before the Major had appeared at the breakfast table, had finished the morning inspection of the stables, a business which took no little time, and ended either in a gallop round the paddocks, or half-an-hour's schooling of a young one. There was a miniature steeplechase course in the paddocks, and on more than one occasion a dark horse, known only to the public as being trained in private, had won a good handicap at a nice price with Mr Berkeley Foster in the saddle. But the extent of Berkeley's operations was only known to himself and his confidential commission agent.

Berkeley was his own stud-groom, and a very strict stud-groom he was. Everybody in his stable had to know his work and to do it. His favourite boast was that no hunting-stables were better managed than his were, and certainly it seemed impossible that any stables could be better managed. He had no objection to taking off his coat and teaching a helper how to groom a horse, but he expected him to remember the lesson. He made no rule forbidding his servants from visit-

ing the local ale-house; but a man or boy found drunk was dismissed at a moment's notice. Briefly, Berkeley was a genius in the art of mingling sternness with indulgence, so far as stable management was concerned.

He had completed his usual inspection, and watched his string of hunters at morning exercise, before he mounted his cob to canter in to Nalshiffe. He always liked to post important letters himself, instead of trusting them to servants, so at least he said. There were people, however, who opined that he was on terms of suspicious intimacy with the post-master at Nalshiffe, and that his agent in London knew of the trials of Mr Lowton's horses several minutes before the gentleman who worked the stable commission. But these reports were only whispered. As yet there was no proof against Berkeley Foster, and he rode home to breakfast from Nalshiffe with the easy conscience of a man, who has little doubt as to the result of his diplomacy.

But there was one secret which he had not confided to the penny post, namely, his business connection with Maud Lister. He had been concerned with her in more than one conspiracy of doubtful honesty, but he had been too cautious to commit himself in pen and ink. He knew that documentary evidence was dangerous.

"If young Herbert's letter is favourable, I must see my fair partner," he muttered to himself. Then he went in to breakfast with the healthy appetite generally supposed to be the exclusive property of teetotal Sunday-school teachers.

CHAPTER IV

A SPORTING DELILAH

BERKELEY FOSTER was supposed by his racing friends to be a clever man. He was thoroughly conversant with the working of those wheels within wheels which regulate the mechanism of the world of sport. He knew the grand secret of being dishonest without being found out. But he had made one fatal mistake. He had made a woman his confederate, without even pretending to make love to her. He was going to make a worse mistake by advising his confederate to make love to Reggie Herbert. Berkeley understood horses, grooms, jockeys, trainers, *et hoc omne genus*, but he did not understand women.

So far, however, his plans had prospered. Reggie had acceded to his uncle's request, and Major Herbert had been asked to lunch at Slatering Hall, though Lord Slatering had taken care to be absent. Reggie had formally forgiven his

uncle, but, with a *savoir faire* hardly to be expected from him, had let his uncle understand that all confidence was over between them. To a certain extent Berkeley had predicted this, for he felt sure that Reggie would act, according to the advice of Lord Slatering, and he knew that beneath a careless exterior Lord Slatering was a shrewd man of the world. So he was not surprised when the Major told him the result of his interview.

"To put it briefly, open hostility has been exchanged for neutrality. Did you mention our friends at the vicarage?"

"Only incidentally. I said that I was invited for a little visit to Mr Lister's, who was a hunting parson, so that we might meet in the hunting-field, but I did not say a word about the daughter."

"And about the racing?"

"I alluded to it, but Reggie shut up like the proverbial oyster. I gathered that Slatering had some seven or eight chasers in training, but, when I hinted that I should like to see them, Reggie made some feeble excuse. It was as clear as noonday that he did not intend to give me any information about them."

"Slatering's stud-groom is acting as his trainer, under the advice of Slatering and Reggie. Now it is far easier to get information about horses which are trained privately, than about horses in

the stables of the regular trainers. I shall have to go to Slatering. I suppose you found out whether there was a decent hotel or inn in the place?"

"There is the Slatering Arms in Penk."

"And Penk is much the same sort of place as Nalshiffe?"

"Bigger, I should say. At all events the Slatering Arms is a bigger hotel than any in Nalshiffe, and has extensive stabling into the bargain. I went to see the stables in case you might want to take a horse down there."

"That was thoughtful. Did you see the landlord?"

"Yes: he looks like a retired stud-groom. He is a tenant of Lord Slatering. I found that out."

"Then he is probably devoted to his landlord's interests, and would take particular care that no tout should ever get any information out of his hotel."

"There I fancy that you are wrong. As far as I could gather, Lord Slatering is not popular with his tenants. It appears that the first thing he did on coming into the property was to sack the late lord's steward, and place Reggie in his shoes."

"You seem to have gleaned a lot of information considering the short time you were in the place.

I must pay a visit to the Slatering Arms, when you have gone to Brotherton Vicarage."

Maud Lister met the Major at the station and drove him to the vicarage in her go-cart. Short as the drive was, it was sufficiently long to enable the new confederates to understand each other.

"You are a mercenary woman without a heart," thought the Major.

"You are half knave, half fool, and wholly the tool of Berkeley Foster," thought Maud Lister.

But they were agreed as to their plan of campaign. It was simple. The Major was to introduce Reggie to Maud in the hunting-field, and Reggie was to be invited to lunch at the vicarage. Maud was to find out the secrets of the Slatering stable in any way which she thought best. The conversion of the secrets into hard cash was to be left to the discretion of Berkeley Foster, who was to pay Maud twenty-five per cent. of the profits, and a hundred pounds down. The agreement was to remain in force till the close of the Grand National meeting in the first week of April; in other words, Maud Lister, for a stated remuneration, agreed to act exclusively for Berkeley Foster as racing tout in regard to the Slatering stable for a stated period. Should she withhold information or give information elsewhere, she agreed to refund

the hundred pounds, which in reality was a retaining fee. A memorandum of this agreement was actually drawn up, signed by Maud Lister and Berkeley Foster, and stamped at Somerset House. On the face of it, it was merely an agreement for the supply and payment of exclusive training intelligence, and was as perfectly legal as a contract between a newspaper editor and a lady for the supply of fashionable intelligence. Training intelligence may cause inconvenience to the owners of race-horses, and fashionable intelligence may cause inconvenience to the people written about, but that, of course, is a matter of indifference to the high contracting parties, who supply and pay for the intelligence.

Mr Lister's proper vocation was to be a farmer, but circumstances had made him a clergyman. To do him justice, he visited his parishioners both rich and poor. To the rich he talked about horses, to the poor, about pigs and poultry. He had no more idea of the value of money than a schoolboy has. He left all financial business to Maud, and never expressed any wonder how they lived at the rate of a thousand a year on his stipend of two hundred and fifty. Socially, he was a harmless old gentleman, with a love for port wine, and was more at home in the pigskin than in the pulpit. He welcomed the Major with old-fashioned hospitality,

regretting that his limited stables had prevented him putting up his horse, which was stabled at the inn, for Berkeley Foster had lent the Major a mount, which, to use his own expression, he could not possibly bring to grief, and talked on agriculture to him throughout the whole of luncheon.

"Our chief anxiety in these parts is what the new Lord Slatering will do. He is one of the largest landowners in the county. That reminds me—does not your nephew act as his agent?"

"In a limited degree; he is really his private secretary, and Lord Slatering and he do the agency work between them."

"Oh! is that the arrangement? I heard that he had got rid of the old agent, Newgate. Newgate was a good farmer, but no sportsman."

"At all events my nephew is a sportsman."

"Very glad to hear it. I have seen him in the hunting-field, and hope soon to make his acquaintance."

"I shall be most proud to introduce him to you."

"We might ask him here to luncheon, papa, while Major Herbert is with us."

"Certainly, my dear; hounds meet near Slatering Hall to-morrow, so he will be sure to be out."

But the Major knew that it would require all his diplomacy to effect the introduction.

Reggie was out on the following morning and evinced little inclination for the society of his uncle. The introduction would probably not have taken place, if it had not been for Mr Timothy Spraggs, between whom and Mr Lister there existed a strong bond of friendship. They had had a quick burst in the morning of some twenty minutes, and hounds had satisfactorily accounted for their fox. The final obsequies were being celebrated, and Mr Spraggs was chatting to Reggie, when Mr Lister and Maud came up, and the introduction took place. The two hunting parsons were soon discussing the action of an over-officious archdeacon, who had a holy horror of sport, which he publicly expressed on all occasions, and Maud and Reggie were left to trot together to the next covert, while the Major kept discreetly in the background. Reggie was far from being an impressionable young man, but he soon recognised that Maud was pretty, had a good figure, and talked well. At the same time, she was an excellent sportswoman, and did not utter general inanities when she ought to have been attending to what hounds were doing.

But what attracted Reggie more than anything else was Maud's horsewomanship. He had noticed

her going well in the first run in the morning. In the afternoon they had one of those slow hunting runs which enable one to notice the riding of one's neighbours. Maud had a firm seat, fine hands, unlimited nerve, and an intuitive knowledge of what hounds were doing. Then she and her father were evidently on the best of terms socially with the leading members of the Hunt.

"Where the deuce did the Major manage to pick them up?" he asked Lord Slatering as they rode home, after he had accepted Mr Lister's invitation to lunch on the following day.

"Hanged if I know, for the old boy hardly ever goes from home. He has probably met the daughter somewhere, and managed to get an invitation from her. From what I've been told, she is not one of the stick-at-home sort. However, I daresay you will find out to-morrow."

Lord Slatering then let the matter drop. He knew that the Listers held a good position in county society, but he was annoyed that the Major had any friends or acquaintances in the neighbourhood, for he regarded him as a common swindler, and guessed that his present object was to propitiate his nephew; yet he did not know how to warn Reggie without hurting his feelings. After all, he thought, it might be only an accidental visit. It certainly never occurred to him that it was the

commencement of a plot against his own racing stable.

The luncheon passed off pleasantly. Mr Spraggs was the only other guest. Maud had purposely asked him to entertain her father, so that while they inspected the stables, and the small glebe land, which the vicar farmed himself, she was often left *tête-à-tête* with Reggie, and as they had one subject in common, namely, a love of hunting, and as Maud could give him a lot of information about the Slatering country and the members of the Hunt, conversation never flagged, and they were soon on terms nearly approaching to intimacy.

"By the way, I never heard before that you knew my uncle, though, till within the last few months, I fancied that I knew all his friends and acquaintances."

"The Major is only a new acquaintance. We were staying in the same house with him near Nalshiffe, and one soon gets to know people when one is staying in the same country house with them."

"Yes," Reggie assented, while he was puzzling his brains to think who the Major could know at Nalshiffe. "I heard that he had been staying at Nalshiffe, but have forgotten the name of the people with whom he was staying."

This was awkward for Maud, for she could not

tell, if Reggie had heard of Berkeley Foster, and she knew that the reputation of the latter in racing circles was not above suspicion. She took no notice of the hint, and began to praise Mr Spraggs for openly joining with her father in despising the prejudices against hunting parsons. But Reggie remembered the phrase in his uncle's letter: "I, in my old age, after serving my country for many long years, must hide my grey hairs in a little village far from the madding crowd, and deny myself even the little comforts to which I have always been accustomed."

Mr Lister was in high spirits, for he had entered into an alliance, both offensive and defensive, with Mr Spraggs, against the over-officious archdeacon. He told Reggie how glad everybody in the county was that Lord Slatering was favourably disposed towards sport, and unsuspiciously asked the very question which Maud wished him to ask.

"And I hear that he means to keep a few race-horses in training. I hope that he will, for we want a few more men like him to uphold the national sport. I wrote a small pamphlet myself last year on the breeding of race-horses, anonymously, for fear of offending my bishop. Maud, my dear, fetch me two copies from my study. If Mr Herbert will accept one and give one to his lordship, I shall be proud."

Reggie, of course, expressed his delight, and inwardly wondered at a clergyman who wrote racing pamphlets at the end of the nineteenth century, a wonder he communicated to Mr Spraggs, as he drove him back to Slatering.

"Oh, Lister is a fine old fellow, though an oddity. He has a mania for breeding live-stock, from race-horses down to tittle-bats, but he is a genuine good sort. What do you think of the daughter?"

"Well, my acqaintance with her is too short for me to venture to give an opinion. She rides well, exceptionally well, and seems to be well versed in stable management. But she is hardly what one expects a clergyman's daughter to be like."

"Perhaps not, but she would walk three miles to carry a bottle of port to a poor old woman, and she looks after her father, the vicarage, and the parish, in a wonderful way. Her only enjoyment is hunting. She is a good girl is Maud."

Never mind, Mr Spraggs! It is better to be charitable when ignorance is bliss, than to sneer at your friends and neighbours.

Reggie told Lord Slatering what he had heard about the Major visiting Brotherton Vicarage, and gave him Mr Lister's pamphlet. In his own mind

Lord Slatering considered the Major a hanger-on at country houses, invited in order to make himself generally useful, and determined not to invite him to Slatering Hall. But as Reggie's information was false, the thoughts of Lord Slatering on the subject are of little value.

CHAPTER V

A GOOD DAY WITH AN INTERESTING FINISH

IF Mr Newgate had not the heart of a sportsman, he had a very shrewd idea of how to make sport pay, and, though revenge was sweet to him, he was willing to sacrifice his feelings to his monetary interests. He had always had the unenviable reputation of being a near man, but, now that he had retired or been dismissed from the stewardship of the Slatering estates, he was exceptionally free with his money, especially at the Slatering Arms in Penk, where he was hand and glove with the landlord, Mr Samuel Canary. Here he had met Major Herbert, and here also fate ordained that he should meet Berkeley Foster.

It was veritably a case of "diamond cut diamond," as Canary was quick to see, and the astute landlord resolved to look on and profit by the game.

Berkeley had brought with him a stud of six

hunters and a covert hack, so his arrival had caused some sensation in Penk, and reached the ears of the inmates, before Berkeley had made his first appearance in the hunting-field with the Slatering hounds.

"Berkeley Foster! I seem to know the name," Lord Slatering mused aloud. "I have it. Why, he comes from Nalshiffe, where your uncle was staying. He used to be a man-about-town with not the best reputation in the world. He would probably call himself a professional punter, but he was in with a shady lot of betting men."

"I remember the name. He was a member of the 'Curb and Snaffle Club,' and was supposed to be very good in the pigskin. He used to ride between the flags across country."

"Well, we shall soon see what sort of a fellow he is to hounds, though I can't understand why he should forsake Nalshiffe for Penk. By the way, did you notice how well your new friend, Miss Lister, went to-day?"

"Yes, but she rides the best cattle that money can buy. I wonder where she gets the money from. She may have many admirers, but admirers do not often give away thoroughbreds."

"Still she is a young lady who knows her way about, and she owns to doing a little on the turf.

She gave me a strong hint to-day that she would like to go round the paddocks."

"And what did you say?"

"Fenced with the question. Not that I have any particular objection to her going round, though a clergyman's daughter touting for racing information is a curious product of the end of the nineteenth century."

"Yet she is evidently a favourite of Spraggs?"

"But Spraggs is hardly versed in the artful little ways of the female sex. Perhaps the lady knows Berkeley Foster. It would be curious if there was a partnership between them. Well, we shall soon know."

On the next hunting-day Berkeley came out for the first time with the Slatering hounds. The field agreed to a man that he looked like a workman, and as the few who knew him were unaware of his shady racing antecedents, he was generally regarded as an acquisition. Old Mr Lister was loud in his praises, and it was evident that he was on intimate terms with Maud. Two or three men knew him from hunting in the Nalshiffe country as a popular man in county society, and gave him a warm greeting. Even Lord Slatering admitted that he looked like a gentleman, and knew how to put on his clothes, as he watched him standing at covert-side and talking to Maud.

"If he can go as well as he looks, he can't be such a bad sort."

"He was the best man to hounds in the Nalshiffe country when I was there last season, and the Nalshiffe fellows can ride above a bit," remarked his companion, Captain Thornton, of The Household Brigade, who was the eldest son of a large landowner, who was also the Master of the Slatering Hounds. "I suppose we must do the polite to him."

"What made him leave Nalshiffe?"

"Maud Lister, I should think. There's a holloa, and no false alarm either. Now to sit down and ride."

Berkeley and Maud both got well away at the start. And when, after crossing three or four fields, men had settled down into their accustomed places, it was evident that Berkeley's place was in the first flight, and that he meant to stop there. We can always recognise those quiet, determined riders who always will be in the same field with hounds, and Berkeley belonged to this class. Riders equally bold wonder how it is done, forgetting that there is such a thing as having a good eye to a country.

In spite of an easterly wind there was a rare scent, as sometimes will happen, for it is not always the southerly wind and the cloudy sky which pro-

claim a hunting morning. After ten minutes the pace began to tell, the field had become spread-eagled, and there were more than a few empty saddles. Mark that rough-riding farmer on the grey, which he has sent well to the front because he wants to sell him. But the horse is now done to a turn, and rushes the next fence, with the result that he tumbles into the next field on the top of his rider, and is a good five minutes before he gets up again. Maud's game little thoroughbred, who has been carrying his mistress well as usual, pecks badly at the same fence, and kisses the earth before he manages to recover himself. Even Berkeley begins to wish for a check, as he feels that his horse is beginning to show signs of distress. But the pace continues to be as quick as at the start, and the fences are getting bigger. A hog-backed stile causes Lord Slatering's horse to turn turtle, but his rider fortunately falls clear. Mr Spraggs has crossed the last three fields on foot, in the vain hope that somebody may catch his horse for him. Croppers now are the order of the day. A wide, ugly bottom with a rotten bank on the taking-off side brings Berkeley to grief, though he manages to get out on the right side, and pushes along in a tired canter. The first whipper-in is really now the only man with hounds. He can ride under eight stone, and weight will

tell; but it is with a sigh of relief that he sees hounds run from scent to view, and roll over their fox in the next field.

Still a good many managed to straggle up before the obsequies had been celebrated, and accounted for their late arrival in many ways more or less truthful, chiefly less. Explanations were given of dirty backs at the expense of the horse. Flasks and sandwiches made their appearance, and those, who had them, waited anxiously for their second horses.

"Shall you go home?" Berkeley asked Maud Lister.

"Certainly not! My horse will have got his second wind, and I have something to do. You forget, *mon ami*, that I have not yet been in the Slatering stables."

"Nor in Slatering Hall, eh?" Berkeley asked in a significant tone. "By the way, isn't Slatering supposed to be engaged?"

"I have never heard of it. He lives the life of a confirmed bachelor. Do you know anything?"

"Only a rumour. But that was before he became Lord Slatering. By Jove, Maud, suppose you were to become Lady Slatering!"

"Don't talk so loud. Here is his private chaplain. Have you been in the wars, Mr Spraggs?"

Yes; and my horse got away. I had to walk

over three fields. The worst of it was that they were plough."

"Never mind, Mr Spraggs, mud does not break bones. Let me introduce Mr Foster, who is staying for a few days at the Slatering Arms."

Then Maud moved off to her father, who was talking to Lord Slatering on the merits of a particular breed of short-horns. But the arrival of the second horses put an end to coffee-housing, and the huntsman received his instructions for the afternoon coverts. Glorious, however, as these quick things after a straight-running fox are, while they last, they have their drawbacks, for we kill or lose our fox very often in a country where we are not expected, with the result that the earths have not been stopped, and unless we trot back in the direction of the original meeting place, sport in the afternoon is invariably poor.

Maud had been told by the huntsman what his instructions were, and, having an experience of the ways of foxes, guessed that the last covert would be drawn near to Brotherton Vicarage. Nor was she wrong. The first covert drawn yielded a fox, which ran to ground in a spinney after only leading hounds over five fields. Then a fox was chopped in covert; and then a move was made to the Brotherton Big Wood, as Maud had expected would be the case. Lord Slatering, during

this slow hunting, had been amusing himself with Maud's society. Her conversation was a novelty to him, after his confinement to bachelorhood in all its forms at Slatering Hall since his uncle's death. And, foolish man, he considered himself to be wise in his generation so far as the fair sex was concerned, little dreaming that Maud Lister could have given two stone and a beating to the cleverest chorus girl, who ever rented a bijou villa amongst the sacred groves of the evangelist.

Needless to say, Berkeley Foster, from a convenient distance, was watching the game with interest, while he pretended to be absorbed in the conversation of Mr Spraggs.

"You be careful and follow me, Mr Foster, if hounds get away from this big wood, for, I am sorry to say, that on one side there is a lot of wire, some of which is not even marked—more blame to the farmers. You know Whyte-Melville's lines :—

> 'The seasoned old horse jumps his timber with ease,
> The four-year-old jumps water as wide as you please;
> But the wisdom of age, or the four-year-old fire,
> Are helpless alike when you ride 'em at wire.'

I am a Christian clergyman, Mr Foster, but I should like to have the mittens on with the inventor of barbed wire in an eighteen foot ring. How we should have pounded him at Oxford in

the olden days! Hark! I think that I heard a whimper. Yes: and it is a case of 'gone away.' Follow me, Mr Foster, down this ride."

And away went Mr Spraggs with more keenness, perhaps, than with which he ever walked into the pulpit, but with far less keenness than with which he had often gone to the sickbed of a poor parishioner. Berkeley followed him.

"I wish I had known this man earlier in life," he muttered to himself. But we have no time for making good resolutions, when we are galloping down a muddy ride in the wake of a man, whose horse has an unhappy knack of sending Nature's pea-soup into our eyes. So Berkeley bent his head down to prevent being blinded for life, and followed his leader to the gate out of covert, where there was a phalanx of cavalry.

"Never saw such an idiot for opening a gate."

"Are you going to stay here till dinner, sir?"

"Confound it! Let somebody else try!"

Pleasant little conversations are these which we hear when a good-meaning, but clumsy, man attempts to open a gate. Mr Spraggs evidently did not like to listen to this uncharitable talk, for he pluckily put his horse at a formidable post-and-rails, which he rapped with all four legs, but without a fall. Berkeley followed him, in time to catch a glimpse of hounds in the next field.

"'Ware wire! Follow me!" Mr Spraggs shouted, as he rode for a friendly gate, which his old horse topped as if he had been bred in the Agricultural Hall at Islington. It was no time for hesitation. Berkeley followed his pilot, though an ominous rat-tap told him that timber was not the safest obstacle for his mount to negotiate. But Mr Spraggs was in his glory. He was in the first flight, a position to which it was not often his lot to attain, and he knew every yard of the country. Now the pride of place in the hunting-field is only keenly appreciated by the men, who are obliged to ride moderate horses. The man with three hundred guineas beneath him ought to be in the first flight; but the man on fifty guineas rarely gets a front seat in the drama of hounds. Mr Spraggs knew this, and, perhaps, so did his horse. At least it seemed as if they had jointly made up their minds to make the best of their opportunity.

It looked as if the fox were heading for the dining-room of Brotherton Vicarage.

"'Ware wire, my lord!"

It was Maud Lister's voice; but her warning was too late. Why was not Dante a fox-hunter, so that he might have invented a torture in the infernal regions for the double-distilled lunatics, who use barbed wire? Unfortunately, at the end of the nineteenth century, philanthropists

live in their studies, wearing carpet slippers and lounge coats, and the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals is ignorant of the cruelty which barbed wire causes to animals.

Mark the result of the ignorance and incompetence of our agricultural legislators.

Lord Slatering with a broken collar-bone—but that is an accident of common occurrence in the hunting-field—and his horse cut to pieces by hidden wire. Welcome the gun, which puts an end to the dumb animal's misery! Welcome the Act of Parliament, which puts an end to barbed wire!

However, we must "hark forward."

Lord Slatering was taken to Brotherton Vicarage.

Berkeley Foster ruminated that Maud Lister was a very clever girl.

Maud Lister ruminated about Slatering Hall.

CHAPTER VI

FACILIS DESCENSUS AVERNO

BERKELEY FOSTER had told Major Herbert that he believed that Lord Slatering was already booked for the matrimonial stakes, so, when the Major heard that his lordship had broken his collar-bone and was being nursed at Brotherton Vicarage with Maud Lister in attendance, he foresaw a social development in which it might be worth his while to play a part. He wrote to Berkeley to ask him the name of the lady, but the reply was evasive. "I must have been mistaken, and the rumour that I heard could only have been idle gossip. At all events, if Slatering ever did have an *affaire d'amour*, it is over and done with." The Major was angry, for the letter plainly denoted that he might shift for himself, now that Berkeley had no further need of his services.

An idle old bachelor with a limited income is

invariably a mischievous member of society, but when the idle old bachelor has lost caste in society and in clubland through dishonour, he will become a dangerous member of society. So it was with the Major. The doors of clubland were closed to him. He dare not even venture into Pall Mall for fear of meeting and being cut by his old associates. Thus cast upon his own resources, he became a loafer and a drunkard, a frequenter of Strand drinking bars, an unpitiable specimen of a man, who has slipped down the ladder of life, with no hope of ever climbing up again. But this was not the worst. He considered himself to be a modern Ishmael with his hand against every man, and every man's hand against him. He had been a brave soldier with pretensions to scholarship, but the bravery had dwindled into impertinence, and the scholarship had become low cunning. Certainly he still dressed well, and had the outward appearance of a gentleman, when he was sober; but for all that he was a human failure.

He was in humble lodgings in Argyle Square, close to King's Cross, when he received Berkeley's letter. A convenient, though somewhat dirty place is Argyle Square, consisting mainly of lodging- and boarding-houses, dusty in summer and foggy in winter, and in both seasons of the year eminently suitable to promote suicidal mania. It is the con-

necting link between the respectability of Blooms-bury and the rascality of the Euston Road and Somers Town. Here the Major had elected to spend his useless life. His programme was simple. He had brandy and milk in bed at 10 A.M., dressed at 10.30, arrived at the British Museum Tavern at 12.30, where he talked and drank with authors and journalists, who had come over from the reading-room for luncheon, thence to the Cheshire Cheese in Fleet Street for a chop. Afterwards a stroll down the Strand to Charing Cross, which lasted till 6.30, then a 'bus back to King's Cross to dress for dinner, and back to the Strand. Home again at an hour depending upon the quality and quantity of the brandy which he had consumed; for while policemen frog-march poor people to the police station, cabmen drive well-dressed people to their homes. Such is the distinction between the rank and file in the bestial army of inebriates.

After reading Berkeley Foster's letter, the Major was convinced that Lord Slatering had had an *affaire d'amour*, and determined to discover the object of it. But how was he to discover the lady? It seemed like looking for the proverbial needle in the proverbial hayrick. He was puzzled, so had a second tumbler of brandy and milk, and then dressed for his usual strolls abroad, which eventu-

ally brought him to the Cheshire Cheese in Fleet Street. Here, much to his surprise, he found Mr Newgate whom he had met at the Slatering Arms at Penk. The result of the meeting was that they lunched together.

The luncheon was a fencing bout. The Major was aware that Newgate had a grudge against Lord Slatering, and Newgate was aware of the Major's history and his ineffective attempt at reconciliation with his nephew. Both were willing to enter into a crusade against the dominant Slatering party; both were cautious about opening negotiations. Newgate believed in the proverb that, when the wine is in the wit comes out, and plied his companion with champagne. But the Major was a seasoned cask and inclined to be taciturn in his cups. Newgate soon got tired of this silent diplomacy.

"Lucky thing for Miss Lister that his lordship met with his accident so close to the vicarage. She has got her chance now, and she is not the girl to miss a chance."

"But Lord Slatering did not strike me as a marrying man. Besides, I have heard that his affections were already bestowed, though I have not heard the name of the lady."

"The deuce! I never knew that. But your nephew could tell you the name of the lady."

"Perhaps he could, but he won't."

"You may bet your bottom dollar that Miss Lister will find out. Not that it concerns me."

"Nor me."

"No! But I forgot. Your nephew manages the Slatering stable. I only wish that I had a nephew, who managed a racing stable."

"How can you make money over a few chasers?"

"My dear Major, they are the best horses to make money over. How many owners and jockeys can afford to run straight during the jumping season? Now Lord Slatering can afford to do so, and your nephew, from what I have seen of him, is too honest to do anything crooked. I do not believe that he would even give you crooked information. Well the public know this, and you will find that the public will make the Slatering horses favourites, as a rule, since the public is certain that it will have a good run for its money. Now, at nine meetings out of ten held under National Hunt Rules, the stewards are a set of jackasses, so far as racing is concerned, and cannot detect foul riding, unless it is exceptionally glaring."

"Well, I grant that. But how can you make money?"

"Can't your friend Berkeley Foster tell you?"

"He is not my friend; only an acquaintance. But in any case, friends do not confide racing intelligence to one another, unless they are partners."

"Quite so. But I heard a rumour that you and Foster were partners, and that Miss Lister had a share in the business. Don't think me impertinent, Major! People will gossip in little places like Penk."

"Oh, I'm not thin-skinned. I saw something of Penk gossip, while I was at the Slatering Arms. They told me that Lord Slatering had invested you with the noble order of the boot."

Newgate laughed.

"Did they now? As a matter of fact, I invested Lord Slatering with the noble order of the boot, as your nephew, who was present on the occasion, can tell you. However, Major, if you have nothing better to do, and can put up with bachelor's quarters, come down with me to Penk to-morrow."

The Major accepted the invitation, and Mr Newgate left him, satisfied with the result of the luncheon. He had a plan by which he could enrich himself, and rob Lord Slatering. If the plan were not discovered, so much the better; if the plan were discovered, then the Major would appear to be the author of it. As Mr Newgate

thought, Lord Slatering would never prosecute the Major. He reasoned to himself that if the Major was concerned with any conspiracy against the Slatering stable, the conspirators would be safe. His only doubt was in regard to the price which the Major would ask for his own dishonour.

The Major also guessed the secret of Mr Newgate's cordiality, and determined to make his price as high as he could. But both the Major and Mr Newgate were reckoning without Maud Lister, and also without a gentleman who had overheard sufficient of their conversation to arouse his suspicions.

This gentleman was Mr Richard Pebbles.

CHAPTER VII

HOW DICK PEBBLES MADE THE ACQUAINTANCE OF MR STUBBS

ALTHOUGH there were always plenty of male guests staying at Slatering Hall, and Lord Slatering religiously returned the formal hospitality of the county families in the shape of big dinners, yet match-making mammas were not far wrong when they said that Slatering Hall needed a mistress. Lord Slatering apologised for having no female relation to act as hostess, so the match-making mammas resolved to provide him with one in the shape of a wife. Hardly had the resolution attained a tangible form, than Maud Lister looked as if she should seize this matrimonial prize from all comers. Of course the elderly matrons denounced her conduct by such epithets as horrible, atrocious, and unmaidenly; but Maud Lister cared very little for the opinion of elderly matrons. She did care, however, for Berkeley Foster, who had unmistakably hinted that he should

expect a share of the spoils of her matrimonial venture. There had been a scene at the time. Maud had called Berkeley a cad and a blackmailer. Berkeley stroked his moustache and lit a cigarette. He was accustomed to being called opprobrious names. To the annoyance of Maud, he continued to stay at Penk, and to hunt with the Slatering hounds. Whenever she went out she was sure to meet him in the hunting-field, where he behaved towards her like an intimate friend. Worse still, he was continually dropping in at the vicarage, where, of course, he had met Lord Slatering and Reggie.

Lord Slatering now was able to be moved home. He thanked Mr Lister and Maud for their hospitality, and Maud for her careful nursing; but he never said a word which could be construed into a deeper feeling than friendship. As a matter of fact, he was glad to get home, for he wished to look after his chasers. Reggie had heard from Dick Pebbles, and had told his suspicions to Slatering, with the result that Pebbles was now on a visit to Slatering Hall.

"But what the deuce can these fellows gain out of my poor string of chasers?"

"Lay against them, and see that they don't win. This fellow Berkeley Foster is concerned with a betting club, which does a big starting

price business. The arithmetic of the game is simple."

"I can understand that if everything goes as they wish; but how are they to prevent my winning? Reggie, or a lad in my stable, in whom I have every confidence, will ride for me."

"Then I pity Reggie and the lad. At first they will take care that you do win, so that the public will give your stable confidence. But when your horses start at short prices, they will lay them. The game has often been played before, but it is difficult to catch the players."

"I can't understand my uncle lending himself to the game." Reggie spoke for the first time.

Lord Slatering was silent. If Berkeley Foster were implicated in any fraud, might not Maud Lister be also guilty? He remembered how she invariably turned the conversation into racing channels under the pretence of interesting him. She had asked questions, which he thought little of at the time, but if asked by a racing tout, were important. Then there was her intimacy with Berkeley Foster, which certainly was not founded on sentiment, and lastly there was the Major's visit to the vicarage and his present visit to Newgate.

"I must think this matter over quietly to-morrow, while you fellows are hunting. I wish

somebody would ride on the top of this fellow Foster. I tell you what, Pebbles, I am more worried now than when I was a pauper. Either tenants or poachers bother the life out of me."

"Personally, I think I could survive the bother."

Dick Pebbles was far from being a good man to hounds, and he knew it. "A quiet old cob for me, please," was his invariable answer when his friends offered him a mount. He never jumped, unless absolutely compelled. He did not care for it, he said, and he hunted for his own pleasure. Yet Dick generally saw quite as much, if not more, of the fun of the fair as the majority of hard riders. He was never guilty of any breach of hunting etiquette, and as he never aroused the jealousy of his fellow-sportsmen, he was popular in the field. His motto in life was, "If you can't do a thing well, leave it alone." So, when hounds had found, he would keep to the lanes and bridle-paths. Some people might call him a duffer, but Dick would not have cared. At all events he was never a nuisance. Men hunt for many reasons. Dick hunted for healthy exercise and fresh air after his literary labours in Fleet Street.

He knew few members of the Slatering Hunt, so no coffee-housing interfered with his powers of observation. And he was a good observer.

"Who is the lady on the bay thoroughbred, Reggie?"

"Miss Maud Lister, the daughter of a local hunting parson, a capital woman to hounds and supposed to be a beauty. That is Berkeley Foster talking to her. I don't see my uncle out, but there is Newgate."

"A determined bull-dog-looking sort of fellow, too. There's a whimper. Don't bother about me."

Then, as hounds streamed out of covert, Reggie took his usual place in the first flight, and Dick prepared to follow a stout old farmer through a line of gates. But he was puzzled.

"I have seen that girl before," he muttered to himself, but the stout old farmer's horse sent a few pounds of mud into his face, and made him think of other things, and he sat down to bump merrily along, though hounds were already out of sight. The farmer, however, was an old hand, and guessed rightly the line the fox had taken, so he pounded away, followed by Dick.

"Any chance of our seeing them again?" Dick asked, as his pilot pulled up into a trot.

"Maybe, sir, if the fox doubles, which they often do in this country. If he does, we shall nick in for the finish. It may not be altogether sportsmanlike, but at my weight, I have to be cunning, if I want to see anything. Hark! I think I heard

the sound of the horn. We'll just slip into the lane for fear we head him. If they do come our way, then we can nick in with the first flight, as if we had dropped from the clouds. Then's the time to ride."

"Oh! is it?" Dick thought. "Then I shall follow you, my friend, on the chance of your knocking down the fences."

The farmer held up a warning hand, and peeped cautiously through the straggling fence at the side of the lane for some seconds, when he beckoned to Dick.

"There he goes, and ain't his brush draggling? Ten to one, but that we should have headed him back into the death of hounds, if we had been in the field. We'll give the beggar three minutes before we halloa him, and we won't halloa him then, if there is any sign of hounds, but just trot quietly down the lane, and nick in after the first flight, as if we had ridden the line. I did that once and they gave me the brush," and the old man chuckled. "Here are the hounds! Look at 'em, sir! A tablecloth would cover 'em. There's a sight for you! Not a soul within a field of 'em. If we ain't gone the country, we've got the hounds. Come along! Dashed if we shan't be the only two in at the death, and then they'll twig that we haven't ridden the line."

And the farmer, with elbows squared, went galloping down the lane, followed by Dick, through a convenient gate, which landed him in the same field with hounds. Even Dick felt as if he could charge anything now, though at the same time he was glad that he was not called upon to do so, for a gap let him into the next field, where hounds tumbled their fox over.

"The same old trick, Mr Stubbs," the huntsman shouted out, as he spied the farmer.

"Not a bit of it," Stubbs replied good-humouredly, "I rode to hounds, not after them."

"What, Dick, you in at the death!" Reggie said, as he came up with a dirty coat, which betrayed a cropper.

"Yes, nor did I come to grief, my boy, while you have evidently robbed somebody of their land. I followed my stalwart friend here—Mr Stubbs, I believe."

"The worst nicker and craner, and the best preserver of foxes in the country."

"I never headed a fox in my life, Mr Herbert. Ask the Master, if you don't believe me. Now, here's Newgate! I daresay, Newgate, you have ridden straight, eh! Now, wonders will never cease. My old woman was saying to me last night, 'John, I'm told that Mr Newgate hunts.' And I says, 'Right you are, old gal.' 'But' says

she, 'he never used to hunt and kill the foxes in the old lord's time.' So I says, 'There's a new lord now.' Then she says, 'But Newgate got the sack.' And I says, 'That's why he's taken to hunting, so that he can fill it with beans.' Newgate, my lad, here's luck to your reformation!" And the old farmer, taking out a substantial flask out of the pocket of an equally substantial old-fashioned green hunting-coat, drank in mock ceremony to the late steward.

"You like to be facetious, Stubbs," Newgate replied with a smiling face, though he was consumed with anger.

"Leave the man alone, Stubbs, for the time!" Captain Thornton said *sotto voce* to the farmer, who was one of the oldest of his father's, the M.F.H.'s, tenants. "He will give you tit-for-tat. Best be careful, for he is a dangerous customer."

But old Stubbs was not to be gainsaid. He was an oracle with the followers of the Slatering Hounds. Had not he, his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather, rented the same farm from the Thornton family for four generations? He had a respect for the Slatering family, and a profound contempt for Newgate.

"No, Captain; it's not for me to leave a man alone, who is a disgrace to the county.—Damme, Newgate, I am never likely to be facetious with a

poaching thief like you. Who got the late Lord Slatering's poached game sent to the market? Who hired the man to poach it? Who received the cash from the dealers at Leadenhall Market? It was you, Newgate, you thundering blackguard. Now you subscribe to hounds, and lay the former blame on the old lord's shoulders. I know that you are paymaster to every poacher in the county, and I know that you can order your gang to burn every rick on my estate. But, by God! if I live long enough, I shall see you sentenced to seven years of the best at the Assizes. The Queen's arrow will suit you better than a Hunt button."

"For Heaven's sake, be quiet, Stubbs. Consider, man! the hunting-field is not the proper place in which to thrash these matters out. Think of the reputation of the Hunt!"

"I am sorry, Captain Thornton, and beg your pardon; but for all that, I have only spoken the truth, and I can prove it too into the bargain."

Dick Pebbles had listened attentively to this altercation, and he considered Mr Stubbs as a gentleman whose acquaintance it might be desirable to cultivate. He had an easy opportunity. The old farmer, feeling somewhat ashamed of himself for having betrayed temper in the hunting-

field, did not remain for the afternoon's sport, but jogged quietly homewards. Dick, who felt rather sore, and had, in hunting parlance, lost quite sufficient leather, followed him at a distance till they were far from the madding crowd. Then he overtook him.

"You piloted me this morning. Can you tell me my best way to Slatering Hall?"

"Certainly, sir; may I be so bold as to ask if you are a friend of his lordship's?"

"I am an old friend. I may tell you that it was owing to me that Mr Reginald Herbert succeeded Newgate; and, as Lord Slatering, Mr Herbert, and myself have reasons to suspect Newgate of nefarious conduct, which might bring him within reach of the law, I should like—"

"And what may be your name, sir?"

"Richard Pebbles, Barrister-at-Law, and at the present moment, the guest of Lord Slatering. Now, Mr Stubbs, I know little or nothing about this poaching and fox murdering, but I have every reason to believe that Newgate is in a conspiracy against Lord Slatering's racing stable. You know nothing of me, so I don't ask you for your confidence. But I am on such intimate terms with Lord Slatering, that I can invite you to dinner this evening at Slatering Hall, where you will meet Captain Thornton. Will you come?"

"Lord bless you, sir, it's not for me, a plain farmer, to dine with you at the Hall."

"Nonsense, Mr Stubbs, if you have no other engagement, I shall ride your way home and you shall come."

"Well, sir, there's the pigs to feed for this new show in the Midlands, and I must look after the cattle, for I have two heifers going to the show, and I must have a change and brush up. No ladies at the Hall, sir?"

"No; bachelor's Hall and bachelor's party to-night."

"Then I'll come, sir, if you can square my missis. But you must oil her, sir. I can send a lad over to the Hall with your cob with a bit of a line from you; and then I could drive you over in my gig. It's a nice light gig, Mr Pebbles. The last time I drove a gentleman in that gig was after a day's shooting with Squire Thornton. We were hardly a mile from the Squire's place, when he says, 'Stubbs, I left my gloves behind.' 'Never mind, sir, put your hand over the wheel and let my dog smell it; she'll return your gloves.' Well, he did as I told him, and my retriever bitch went off as hard as she could put her paws to the ground to the Squire's place. 'Uncommon bitch for scent, Stubbs,' says he. 'Uncommon, sir,' says I. 'Here she comes, Stubbs!' says he, after five

minutes. 'Got something in her mouth, too.' 'The gloves,' says I. 'No, damme, it's the housemaid's frilled collar,' says he. So it was, sir. An uncommonly good retriever she was, Mr Pebbles. However, here we are. Don't you forget to oil the missis!"

Dick Pebbles did as he was instructed. Mrs Stubbs was delighted with his attentions. Whatever the lady might be to her lawful spouse, she was beaming to his fox-hunting guests. She had won several prizes for running puppies at the Slatering Puppy Shows, such as a silver teapot, a silver coffee-pot, not to mention articles of jewellery; for Squire Thornton was wise in his generation. He said:—

"Running puppies means that you must palaver the petticoats. Give the women a teapot or a piece of jewellery, and they will insist upon their hubbies running a puppy the next year. The puppy eats the hubby's boots, but the missis gets the compensation. In running puppies the grey mare is the better horse."

And Dick Pebbles must have been wise in his generation. At any rate, Mr Stubbs drove him back to dinner to Slatering Hall.

CHAPTER VIII

THE POACHING BURGLAR

OUTWARDLY calm as Mr Newgate was when Mr Stubbs assailed him with language, which, though perhaps justifiable, is seldom used in the hunting-field, inwardly he was consumed with feelings nearly approaching to homicidal mania. He had been insulted before the field by one of the oldest and most respected tenant farmers in the Hunt, and had been publicly accused of criminal malpractices in the shape of receiving money from poachers. He had been told that he was a poaching receiver. So, as a matter of fact, he was; but none of us like our malpractices to be heralded abroad. We may take a pride in confessing our sins, but we object to other people confessing them on our behalf.

Mr Newgate did not wait for the sport which the afternoon might afford, but wended his way homewards in a manner which was certainly un-

comfortable to his horse. Poor horse! Whyte-Melville described him as the companion of our sorrows and our joys; but, when he is the companion of our sorrows, he has a sorry time. Mr Newgate in his bad temper spurred his horse, then caught him up short by the curb, then hit him over the head with his heavy hunting crop, till with spurring, jerking, and hitting—for whipping is not the word for it—he succeeded in turning the docile animal into an unmanageable brute, and, as the quadruped brute was stronger than the biped brute, Mr Newgate was landed comfortably in a wet ditch by the laneside.

Now, when a man's temper has been ruffled, a damp bed, in the shape of a wet ditch, is not likely to restore it to its usual equilibrium. Such we may take it to be the rule, and Mr Newgate was no exception to the rule. He had let go of the bridle-rein, and his horse had taken golden use of the opportunity to gallop home to his stable. Mr Newgate uttered unparliamentary language; his horse neighed for his corn.

How long Mr Newgate might have remained in his muddy bath can only be a matter of conjecture, if it had not been for the arrival of Sam Parsons, the most notorious poacher in the Slatering country. Sam Parsons had done time on more than one occasion, and could say, without fear of

contradiction, that he was well known to the police. To do him justice, he was the finest specimen of a rustic scoundrel that could be found between the Land's End and Gretna Green. He had commenced his manhood as a prize-fighter, but had lost the confidence of his backers through his inability to take punishment. Then he became a village ale-house loafer, and performed tricks of strength for pots of four-ale. Finding that these performances were not likely to break the Bank of England, he became a professional poacher, and did a little overtime in the highway robbery business, whenever he came across an elderly gentleman or an unprotected female. He was a coarse, cowardly ruffian, who ought never to have called a woman his mother.

But Sam Parsons, like most of the tribe to which he belonged, possessed a certain amount of low cunning. In the prostrate and undignified figure of Mr Newgate, he saw a chance of making money. Therefore he came to his rescue.

"Is that you, Parsons? Ugh! Get me out of this confounded ditch, and I'll promise—"

"Never ye mind the promise! I knows yer, Newgate. Now, if I 'elps yer, what price the rhino?"

"Damn the rhino! Get me out of this ditch first!"

"Not me, Mr Newgate. You looks very comfortable, sir; and I does know as 'ow many people would like yer to be as you are, until the blessed day of resurrection, when the old gentleman down below 'eats up his furnace. Strike me blind, but I should like to be the stoker!"

"None of your folly, man! Help me out of this, and I'll be your friend."

"Very good, Mr Newgate, but I likes to strike when the iron's hot. Old Stubbs gave you a rare whigging to-day, and Lord Slatering told you to go to the devil months ago. Curse Stubbs, Squire Thornton, and Lord Slatering! I 'ates the three of 'em. If you 'ate 'em, I'll 'elp yer, but, blimy if I does, if you don't join in with me."

"Get me out of this confounded ditch, man, then I'll talk to you. How the devil can I talk to a man, when I am half drowned and three parts suffocated?"

"Now, there's soment in that, when I comes to think on it. Ye does look uncomfortable, Mr Newgate. Them ditches are damp."

"Are you or are you not going to help me out of the ditch?"

"Now that depends on circumstances. I might give yer one over the 'ead, and walk away quietly to my little 'ome with the contents of your pockets. Then the crowner 'ud say, 'Gentlemen of the jury,

the deceased was thrown from his horse whilst in a state of intoxication. Accidental death, gentlemen, I presume.' 'Certainly, sir,' says the foreman of the jury. 'And we recommend Mr Samuel Parsons for a pension for life.' Then I smile, for all the world, like a grinning ape with a ton of ten-day-old filberts, and the crowner commends me."

"Get me out of this ditch, you bally idiot."

"I ain't an idiot. I can speak as well as any mouthpiece who ever put 'orse 'air on his saddle. I spoke to Mr 'Awkins once. I said, 'Not guilty,' and 'e says, 'Six months.' 'E was a silly cuckoo. 'E ought to have given me twelve. Is that ditch very damp?"

"Get me out of it!"

"How much have you got on yer? No promises, old man."

"Four pounds in gold, and some odd silver. Come, be quick, Parsons. Here it is! You must get me home."

Parsons took the money, and then dragged Newgate out of the ditch.

"That's another case of highway robbery, though there weren't no violence. Your 'oss did the violence. Now I'll tell ye something. Your rope has been strung, Mr Newgate. Come along! You and I knows each other, Mr Newgate. I can

tell you something, which will curdle your heart."

Newgate had staggered to his legs, looking like a drowned rat after a thunderstorm.

"What can you tell me, Parsons?"

"I can tell you how you can get your revenge, and chance it. Look here, Mr Newgate, I've been through the mill, and a damned hard mill it was to go through. But I learnt something. I'm not going to talk to you in a country lane, where the bally sparrows would report our little conversation at Scotland Yard. Now, my little hut is within a mile of here, and my missus will give you a warm. Then we can talk. Come along, Mr Newgate, and I'll tell ye something which will warm the cockles of your heart. Come along to my little shanty. I'll tell ye, and show ye something."

It did not take more than twenty minutes, in spite of damp top-boots, for Mr. Newgate to reach the poacher's cottage, where he found a blazing fire, surmounted by a saucepan which gave forth a savoury odour, betraying the gamey nature of its contents. Mrs Parsons was, what is commonly termed, a tidy woman, and her cottage was the picture of cleanliness and comfort. She drew up the best arm-chair to the fire for her visitor, mixed

him a steaming tumbler of stiff brandy-and-water, and then discreetly retired.

"You've a nice little crib here, Parsons," Newgate began, as he warmed his hands over the fire.

"Pretty snug, sir. I've a nice handy cellar below, too." And Parsons stamped the floor, which gave forth a hollow sound. "Funny contents in that cellar at times. If that cellar could speak, it could tell some rum stories."

"So could that saucepan, I suspect."

"Oh, that's kid's play. Melting game is good sport, when one's hungry. Melting silver pays better."

"You are inclined to be very confidential, my friend."

"What's the odds, when there ain't any witnesses. Now, you know the interior of Slatering Hall, as well as I know the coverts outside. Mr Newgate, I should like to go inside."

"As a burglar?"

"Well, I don't suppose that I am likely to go as an invited guest, like Mr Stubbs, though I reckon that I should carry more away with me. There must be a rare lot of plate."

"One moment! Do you think that I should connive at a burglary?"

"Depends on circumstances. If you was implicated, I'll stake my affidavit, you would turn

Queen's evidence. If I made it worth your while you'd be as mute as my old lurcher, especially when you could sit at home and chuckle to yourself, and think how you had got the best of Lord Slatering. There must be a mint of plate at the Hall. I calculate it at ten thousand pounds."

Parsons looked inquiringly at Newgate.

"I should value it at fifty thousand, but that would mean ten thousand to you, I suppose?"

"Well, the manufactured silver ain't hardly worth the trouble of carrying away and melting. It's the gold I like to touch. Silver and jewellery are not worth the risk. We have reduced burglary to a fine art, and the detectives have reduced the science of catching burglars, to a ten-to-one chance."

"Yet you run the chance?"

"Nothing venture, nothing win. If you want to make a bit you must run risk. But if I run a risk, it must be for a big stake. Now, sir, what is the use of you and me beating about the bush? You give me certain information, and I'll pay you for it; and give you your revenge into the bargain."

"And supposing you are caught!"

"I should get it stiff. But I don't think there is much chance of that. I work by myself, so nobody can give the game away."

"Still you bestow your confidence on me?"

"Because you couldn't do me any harm by betraying it. Look at the facts. You come to my crib after being insulted in the hunting-field, and give me four quid, and have a snack of game which ought to be in the Slatering coverts, instead of being inside that saucepan. I propose, as a joke, a little burglary to a man who is a notorious receiver of poached game. Your evidence wouldn't be believed."

"Stubbs can't prove that I was ever a receiver of poached game."

"Can't he? I should say he could. I don't like Stubbs, but I never knew him to tell a lie. I guess the people at Leadenhall must have given you away."

Newgate was silent for some moments. Could he trust this man? he asked himself. If he could he should make money and earn his revenge. He only had to give him certain information. Should he risk it?

"When do you propose to bring off this business?"

"To-night, if you tell me what I want to know. I never delay matters. No time like the present. There won't be any moon to-night, either. All I want to know is the way to the plate-chest."

"That would be no good to you. The plate-

chest only contains the silver, which is in use. The gold plate is kept in the strong-room. It used to be kept there, at all events; but perhaps the present lord has sent it to the bankers."

"No, he hasn't," Sam Parsons replied confidently. "I made the butler drunk the other night at the tap-room of the Slatering Arms. He's a silly old buffer."

"Then why didn't you get your information from him, instead of coming to me?"

"How could I pump him before a room-full of gaping, listening idiots? Why he'd be the first man to spot me to-morrow morning!"

"Where and how shall you effect an entrance?"

"Well, I shan't exactly walk through the front door, you bet, but I shall do the next thing to it. I like to work these jobs as genteelly as I can. Breaking in at windows or tumbling down chimneys is vulgar. I shall just walk through the back door into the servants' hall. Now give me the line of country from the servants' hall to the strong-room."

Newgate took out his pencil, and tearing a leaf from his pocket-book, sketched the way from the servants' hall to the strong-room. Parsons looked over his shoulder, and from time to time asked him questions.

"There, that will do," he said at last. "When

shall you see me again? You can stop here to-night, if you like, though I wouldn't if I were you."

"No, I must go home, if only for the reason that Major Herbert, young Reginald Herbert's uncle, is staying with me. But I shall see you before long."

Mr Newgate then partook of the savoury poached game, and afterwards walked home. Parsons watched him till he was out of sight.

CHAPTER IX

AN UNWELCOME VISIT

UNDER any circumstances it is irksome for a strong, full-blooded man to be confined to the house, but when mental worry is added to the confinement, the position is hardly tolerable. Lord Slatering felt deeply annoyed. Having always lived in the society of honourable men and women, he could not conceive dishonour. He knew that it did exist, as he knew that crime existed from reading the newspapers; but he had never been brought face to face with it.

Mr Spraggs had come to luncheon, and to him Lord Slatering unburdened his mind. Mr Spraggs would not hear a word against Maud Lister, though he was willing to believe anything against Newgate; still he could offer no suggestion, which was hardly wonderful. A man does not expect advice about his racing stable from his parish priest, however consoling it may be to him to

talk about his racing troubles. So Lord Slatering uttered complaints, and Mr Spraggs uttered consolation, till Reggie returned home, and gave an account of the altercation between Stubbs and Newgate.

"This only makes matters worse. How can Stubbs know anything about Newgate?"

But before anybody could answer the question, a servant entered with a note from Dick Pebbles, saying that he was bringing Stubbs to dinner.

"You will stay, Spraggs. Thornton is the only other guest. I should like to thrash this matter out, and have done with it."

"No, Slatering, it is my duty to thrash the matter out."

"What do you mean, Reggie?"

"I mean after dinner to go to Newgate's house, and see my uncle," Reggie replied in a determined voice, which admitted of no denial.

Lord Slatering said nothing, but when a few minutes afterwards, Reggie went upstairs to his bedroom to get out of his hunting kit he followed him.

"Look here, Reggie, old boy, you must not take this thing to heart. I understand and appreciate your feelings; you know that; but I would sooner send every horse in the stable up to the hammer to-morrow morning, than let you get into

any mess. This Newgate is evidently a dangerous customer, and has got hold of your uncle. What his game is, I cannot for the life of me understand."

"But I will understand. At one time I would have gone through fire and water for my uncle's sake; now, I wouldn't cross the road to give him a penny if he were starving. I will listen to what Stubbs has got to say about Newgate, and then I shall go to Newgate's house, and tell my uncle to leave it. He can go to the Slatering Arms for the night, and in the morning—well, shake the dust of this country off his shoes."

"My dear boy, he might refuse."

"Then, I shall give certain instructions to my solicitor, Mr Miller. But I don't think he will refuse."

"Well, whatever you do, don't allow yourself to get mixed up in any angry altercation with this man Newgate. I believe Spraggs to be right when he says that he is dangerous."

"I'll be cautious, and won't lose my temper. I may not even see Newgate, for I shall ask to see my uncle alone. I wonder what old Stubbs will have to say for himself. It was a strong order to accuse a man before a hunting-field of receiving poached game, and to tell him that the Queen's arrow would suit him better than the Hunt button.

Dick Pebbles would not bring him to dinner, unless he had found out something more than we know. But in any case Newgate will have to bring an action for slander; he can hardly let such a sweeping accusation pass by in silence, however thick-skinned he may be."

"And then there'll be a scandal in the county for weeks, and all the sporting and agricultural papers in the country will take it up. We should probably have to give evidence. Well, there's nothing to do now, but to wait and hear what Stubbs has to say."

Mr Stubbs was not a nervous man in any society into which he might happen to be thrown; but he felt somewhat ashamed of himself as he entered Slatering Hall. He realised that he had created a scene in the hunting-field, and he knew that it was bad form to make himself conspicuous. Besides, Newgate's poaching conduct had nothing to do with him. It was Lord Slatering's business, and he had no right to meddle with it. Lord Slatering might be angry with him. Then he was going to meet Captain Thornton, the son and heir of his own landlord, who had told him in the hunting-field to keep quiet. Altogether, he began to wish that he had stayed at home.

However, the wish was soon dispelled by Lord

Slatering's cordial welcome, and Captain Thornton's hearty handshake.

"By Jove, Stubbs," the latter exclaimed, "you pitched into that fellow Newgate to-day. I tried to stop you, but, upon my soul, it was very amusing at the time. I don't know whether the sequel will be amusing."

"Well, Captain, I didn't mean to be too hard upon him. I only spoke the truth."

"What? Do you tell us seriously that he was the captain of an organised gang of poachers?"

"No; he'd be in bed when the actual poaching took place. He just bought the game at his own price, and consigned it to the London market, where he has a brother in the trade. I found it out by accident; but it's a long story."

"Then we'll keep it till after dinner, for, though I am confined to the house, you hunting people must be longing for the flesh pots of Egypt."

If there were no mistress to do the honours of Slatering Hall, there was an excellent *chef* to satisfy the appetites of the host and his guests, and an excellent cellar to satisfy their thirst. Mr Stubbs did full justice both to the eatables and to the drinkables, and, when the cloth was removed, was ready to tell his story about Newgate. Briefly it was this. When Newgate became agent, the Slatering coverts were well preserved and held

plenty of game, but the game gradually disappeared, and the late lord took no interest in the disappearance. The matter was discussed at the weekly farmers' ordinaries on market days, and was considered to be a disgrace to the country by that section of the farmers who were sportsmen. They felt that their *esprit de corps* had been wounded.

"You see, my lord, the ordinary poacher can only pick up a small bag in a night, and could never clear coverts of game. Even if he did, he wouldn't be able to find a market for it," Stubbs explained.

But we will continue the story in our own words.

It was evident that there must be an organised gang of poachers, whose practices were either connived at or superintended by Newgate. When Newgate came to Slatering the old keepers were dismissed, and the new keepers were, of course, Newgate's creatures. It was of no use to tell the old lord that he was being robbed, for he cared nothing about sport, and by some cunning means Newgate had succeeded in gaining his implicit confidence. It was necessary to get such direct evidence as could convict him in a criminal court. But farmers are not detectives, and, a less artful man than Newgate could easily have eluded their

vigilance. They made inquiries amongst all the poulterers in the county, who declared to a man that they never had any game from the Slatering estate. The station-master at Penk, the nearest railway station, said that no game of any big amount was sent off from his station. Where, then, did the game go to?

Stubbs was the first to find a clue. He was in London for the Cattle Show week, and one morning strolled into Leadenhall Market, where he saw Newgate, fortunately before Newgate saw him, for the steward was engaged in animated conversation with a dealer. Stubbs' suspicions were aroused, and he asked a man in the market for the name of the dealer. "Newgate: that's his brother as he's talking to, the agent of Lord Slatering, from whom he gets his game." "Does he?" Stubbs asked. "Yes, that he does, and precious cheap too, for he can afford to undersell anybody in the market. The game ain't consigned to him here, but to his private place at Streatham, and he drives it up." "What's that for?" "Blest if I know. It don't always do to ask questions." Stubbs invited his informant to a little liquid refreshment, with the result that he left him with ample evidence that the Slatering game was sold by Newgate's brother at Leadenhall.

Mr Stubbs had attentive listeners as he narrated

his story. Captain Thornton was the first to speak.

"I suppose you could prosecute the pair of them, Slatering."

"H'm! He would say that he had my uncle's permission to dispose of the game. Are you off, Reggie? Good luck! Of course I shall sit up for you."

Reggie was soon striding through the park to Newgate's house. The night was so dark that he could hardly see a yard before him. A nasty night for a nasty errand was his soliloquy, as he rang Newgate's front door bell, and handing the servant his card, asked if he could see Major Herbert alone on private business.

The Major was engaged in his usual occupation of drinking brandy and water. Newgate was assisting him. Both were drinking to drown care. There was no attempt at conviviality. The Major took the card, and turned pale as he read it.

"May I ask who your late visitor may be?"

"My nephew. He wishes to see me alone."

"Rather cool, isn't it, for a young gentleman to call at a house at ten o'clock at night, and ask to see a guest alone? If I were you I should refuse to see him."

"Would that be wise?"

"Oh, do as you like. This is Liberty Hall, you know.—Ask the gentleman in here."

The servant did as she was told, and Reggie entered the room.

"Good evening, Mr Herbert. This is an unexpected pleasure. I never thought to welcome my successor within my own home; but I am afraid I owe the honour to having your uncle as my guest."

"I certainly had some private information for Major Herbert," Reggie replied with marked stress on the word private.

"It's late for business, Reggie, isn't it, my dear boy?" the Major asked in a husky voice.

"The business need not take more than five minutes."

The Major looked helplessly at Newgate. Brandy had destroyed his old *savoir faire*, and his hand trembled like an aspen leaf.

"I hardly think your uncle is fit for business to-night, Mr Herbert, especially if it is important, as I presume it must be, or you would not have called at this hour. You may not know it, but he has been far from well lately, and is staying here to recruit his health."

Reggie glanced at the brandy decanter, but said nothing.

"You do not take the hint, sir. I do not know

what the manners and habits of the new master of Slatering may be; but I do know that it is my habit to protect my guests from unwelcome intruders. You will excuse my seeming want of hospitality if I ring the bell for my servant to show you the door." And Newgate suited the action to the word.

"Very well, Major Herbert, I came here to warn you, but as you are not prepared to listen to my warning, in future I shall communicate with you through my solicitor, Mr Miller." And Reggie turned to leave the room.

"Stop one moment, Reggie! I'll listen, my boy!"

"You forget that your host has ordered me out of his house. If you wish to listen, you can put on your hat and coat, and come with me to the Slatering Arms."

"Do no such thing, Major! This is madness or the folly of puppyhood."

"Or the insolence of crime," Reggie flashed out, forgetting his resolution to keep his temper. The elder man remained perfectly self-possessed.

"I can make some allowance for young blood," he sneered. "But there is a limit to that allowance. I always thought that you were a fool, Mr Herbert, but I did give you credit for being a gentleman. It appears that I have been mistaken. Is it necessary

that I should have you ejected from this house by force?"

Reggie turned to his uncle.

"Are you coming with me to the Slatering Arms?"

"Come! I've had enough of this nonsense. Out you go!"

Before Reggie could guess his intention, Newgate had seized him, and ran him through the hall, and out of the front door, which was immediately shut. Newgate returned to the sitting-room with a quiet smile of triumph on his lips; but the Major was trembling all over.

"What is the matter, man? You look as if you had the ague."

"He'll prosecute me. I'm a ruined man, and shall end my days in gaol. Why didn't you let me go with him?"

"Nonsense! he'll do nothing of the sort. Pull yourself together, and I'll see that you come to no harm. Go to bed, have a good night's rest, and you'll be a different man in the morning."

The Major staggered up to his bedroom, but Newgate did not follow him.

"Lucky I got rid of him!" he muttered to himself. "If he had stayed longer he might have disturbed Parsons. Now it will be war to the knife. Twice in one day I have been accused of crime.

Never mind! Words won't kill me, and if the worst comes to the worst, I can get clean away with all my savings."

A man may brave out his misdeeds even to his own mind, and thus acquire a species of false courage, though in his inner consciousness there is a vague feeling of alarm. Newgate would not own it to himself, but he felt that he was not safe. Twice in one day he had been accused of crime. It was curious that in spite of the words which he had muttered to himself, he examined the contents of his safe before retiring to rest, and satisfied himself that everything was ready in case he had to make a hasty escape.

CHAPTER X

THE BURGLARY

REGGIE'S feelings as he walked back to Slatering Hall were the reverse of enviable. He had volunteered to go upon a mission, and had failed. Moreover, he had found himself in the ignominious position of being forcibly ejected from another man's house. But what annoyed him most, was his failure in regard to his uncle. He had meant to reclaim him, but now he could not possibly hold any further communication with him. He related the result of his visit to Lord Slatering, but even then tried to excuse his uncle.

"He seemed to have no will of his own. He was maudlin with brandy for one thing. I suppose these fellows take care to keep him in that condition, for some reason of their own."

"Well, it can't be helped, I shall consult my solicitor about Newgate. If Stubbs' story is true, I mean, if it will bear cross-examination, we shall

have a clear case against Newgate. Then there is this racing business. Pebbles has got a theory how they intend to work it; but even he can't imagine what the relationship can be between Maud Lister and Berkeley Foster."

"I should feel inclined to ask the lady. You know her fairly intimately, though you have only known her a short time."

"But long enough to know that she would not answer the question."

"Then make love to her!"

"Too dangerous. She would want to marry me."

"And might succeed, eh? I can't understand what the bond between her and Foster is, and I've watched them carefully in the hunting-field. They appear to be intimate, and yet she seems to have a contempt for him."

"Pebbles says that her face is familiar to him, but that he can't recollect where he has met her."

"And Pebbles' acquaintance with the daughters of country parsons is limited. Perhaps he may recollect where he has met the lady in the morning. Well, this has been a day of unpleasant surprises for me. I feel dead beat, yet I doubt if I shall be able to sleep. The night is as dark and rough as it could be. I could hardly see my hand before my face coming across the park."

As Reggie had prophesied, though he was physically tired, mental worry drove sleep from his eyes. He tossed about restlessly on his bed, till he gave up the attempt of going to sleep, and got up to smoke a pipe in front of his bedroom fire. Outside the wind roared, and the rain came down in torrents. The business must be important which would take men out on such a night.

Sam Parsons revelled in it, as he drove a little pony, which had been specially trained for these nocturnal excursions, through the wind and rain. The pony was periodically lent to Parsons by a confederate in the trade, together with the trap, which was furnished with silent indiarubber tyres. Like a country doctor's nag, when his master is called in the dead of night to assist in the increase of Her Majesty's population, Parsons' borrowed pony would stand without moving any muscle, beyond his jaws, for hours, if his nose-bag was plentifully victualled. He was only the prototype of humanity. Rich food and old wine have caused many gigantic frauds to be denominated as disastrous commercial speculations.

Let us for a moment follow the pony, as he was driven through a line of field gates into Slatering Park. Sam Parsons knew every cart-track on the Slatering estate. So did the pony. They crossed three ploughed fields out of the high road. The

fourth gate led them into Slatering Park. Then they turned short round to the left, where there was an avenue of trees, which could afford shelter to the pony, who whisked his tail when he perceived that he should get some shelter during his waiting hours, for he was not always accustomed to shelter. But Parsons in his way was a humane individual. He gave the pony a nose-bag, and a heavy rug, and left him beneath the trees, knowing that he would not budge an inch till he came back.

This is no exaggeration. A country doctor's nag will stand outside a cottage door while its master attends a confinement lasting two or perhaps three hours. The champion burglar, Peace, had a pony who would stand for six hours as rigid as the Duke of Wellington's statue at Hyde Park corner.

But we must "hark forward." Beneath the trees Sam Parsons left the pony and trap about one hundred yards from the back door through which he expected to make his entrance into Slatering Hall. He was an adept in his profession was Sam Parsons. He saw that his pony and trap were ready for him at an emergency. He had hooked back the gates to the fields through which he had driven into the park by a contrivance by which in the event of pursuit he could sling them to, and

thus gain time on his pursuers; for Sam did not bother his head about cattle and young live-stock straying about the country. Besides, live-stock on a night like this would be sheltering beneath any shelter which they could find.

To give him full credit, Sam Parsons was a heroic burglar, who could have given weight and a beating by a distance—and a long distance—to Henry VIII when he took it into his head to do a little monasterial housebreaking. He did not make himself up as the end-of-the-century burglar, as represented upon the boards of transpontine theatres. He regarded the skull mask and black peep-holes of the female novelist as akin with the mailed armour of our own Dick the Dauntless, who was defeated by Saladin mounted on a jackass, according to Sir Walter Scott.

Sam Parsons was wise in his generation, but he was born after the generation which would have appreciated him.

He ought to have been a Crusader or a Jesuit Priest.

Having seen, as far as circumstances would allow him to do so, to the welfare of the pony, Parsons took a couple of strong sacks out of the trap, looked to his tools, and then walked carelessly to the back door. Indeed, there was no necessity for the caution usually taken by burglars. Parsons

might have marched up to the front door with a bugle, like a mediæval Knight Templar, and demanded Slatering Hall to surrender, but nothing less noisy than an Alexandrian bombardment could have been heard above the whistling of the wind. To this back door, as Parsons knew, there were no bolts, and the lock, though heavy, was clumsy and old-fashioned, and opened easily to a skeleton key.

"More comfey inside than outside," Parsons muttered, as he took a flask out of his pocket, and a long drink out of the flask. Then he proceeded to business. His habits for many years had made him accustomed to darkness, and he walked through the passages which went by the offices to the living rooms, as confidently as if they had been lit up by electric light, thanks to the plan which Newgate had given him. When he reached the hall his troubles commenced. He had to pass through the library and through a small study before he came to the strong-room. He lit his dark lantern, and was about to cross the library when the study door at the further end was opened, and the library was immediately lit up by electric light. Parsons whipped a revolver out of his pocket, but before he could raise it, Dick Pebbles shouted:—

"Move one inch and I'll shoot you. Drop

that revolver on the floor. What, you won't, eh?"

A sharp report and Parson's right wrist was broken. His own revolver dropped to the ground.

"You are very foolish. If you had dropped your revolver when I told you I should not have broken your wrist, and, as I expect, awakened the household."

"You've copped me, Guv'nor, this time. I've been sold."

"Of course you have," Dick Pebbles replied, though he did not understand the remark. He had had some work to finish, and had stayed up late in the study to do it. Hearing footsteps in the library he had come out and turned on the electric light, expecting to see Reggie or Lord Slatering. It was only owing to an accident that he had the revolver in his possession. On changing his dress coat for a smoking lounge coat he had put in the pocket a small revolver to show to Lord Slatering, as it contained a new patent connected with slipping in the cartridges. He had left the revolver with the cartridges in it on the writing-desk in the study, and had picked it up by instinct when he heard Parsons in the library.

"Now, Gov'nor, how was I sold?"

Dick looked at Parsons with the eagle eye of cross-examination, for he had not the faintest idea

in regard to the identity of the burglar. Still it was evident that he had an accomplice or accomplices. Dick, however, was saved the trouble of answering, for Reggie, Lord Slatering, and two men-servants rushed into the library, and Parsons was soon placed in "durance vile." Curiously enough, his first thought at the moment was for the pony, and a man was sent to bring it to the stable. Another man was sent to the police-station at Penk. Parsons heard these instructions given with seeming indifference, though his brain was working rapidly. He had been in tighter places than his present position many a time before, and did not despair of getting away now, though he was guarded by five strong men, and had a broken wrist into the bargain. He looked pleasantly at his captors and remarked:—

"Well, you've copped me; but I suppose you've allowed my pals to clear off. I guess it'll take that young man of yours some time to reach Penk; but I'm in no hurry, it's very snug here; but you might give me something to bandage up this wrist, and a drop of brandy, or I shall faint."

"Yes, you shall have both. How many pals did you have?"

"Only a couple, boss. Nice quietly behaved lads they are, too, except when they put up their

dukes in self-defence. Here's your 'ealth, sir." And Parsons drank off a stiff glass of brandy and water.

"You are an impudent scoundrel. Do you mean that your pals will assault my servant?"

"Not knowing, can't say. They would hang about like for a bit, and if they spotted him would ask him politely where he was going."

Parsons continued to talk, or, in other words, to tell lies. He saw that his first idea, namely, that Newgate had betrayed him, was erroneous, and that Dick's presence in the study was merely an unfortunate accident. He asked himself whether he could do any good by betraying Newgate, for his opinions of honour amongst thieves were lax. Time was flying, and the Penk police would soon be putting the handcuffs on him.

"Well, boss, can't we arrange this little matter amongst ourselves as friends? I didn't walk in here without an invitation."

"You mean without information."

"As you like, I ain't particular to a word. Now, if you puts me away you won't do yourself any good; maybe you'd do yourself a lot of harm. But if you open that window and look another way for a minute, I'll tell you something you'd like to hear. I'm not the only man in this business, and somebody else might have better

luck than I've had. Take my tip! You'll save yourself a lot of trouble if you do."

Lord Slatering looked doubtfully at Dick Pebbles. Parsons saw his hesitation and determined to play his trump card.

"A certain gent was accused to-day publicly in the hunting-field of being the leader of a gang of poachers. I won't mention names, but the same gent spent the afternoon at my cottage. You've got a nice lot of gold plate in your strong-room. If I were you I'd send it to the bank."

"Do you mean to tell me that Newgate put you up to this job?"

"Yes, my missis was present, and will tell you everything; for if you let me go, I must clear out of the neighbourhood without going home, for they'll know me at Penk."

"Give me your name and address?"

Parsons complied with the request, and Lord Slatering opened the window. At the same time the footsteps of the Penk police were audible in the hall.

"Not much time to be lost. You can tell them to follow me if you like. Let 'em all come! Once in the park, and I'm safe."

And Parsons sprang through the window as the policemen entered the library.

This conversation had been carried on in a low

tone apart from the two men-servants, who did not see that the escape had been connived at. In the confusion Parsons got a good two minutes' start, and though the policemen and servants searched for him till daylight, he got clean away.

"But we shall be sure to catch him," said the sergeant who was in authority. "He is an ex-convict, and so well known, that when the hue and cry is out for him he is certain to be taken, in spite of his cunning. His broken wrist alone is enough to give him away."

"H'm!" Dick ejaculated, after the policeman had left. "That man won't be taken in a hurry. What shall you do about Newgate? There is no evidence against him at present: but give him enough rope and he'll hang himself."

"So I think. Then the real history of the affair had better remain a secret between our three selves till we get further evidence."

CHAPTER XI

A NASTY CROPPER

MAUD LISTER was undoubtedly a clever woman, but so far she had made no progress either in her matrimonial or in her racing scheme against Lord Slatering. Berkeley Foster was getting impatient, and Berkeley was not the man to hide his impatience. He could use language such as no sane man would utter before a Sunday-school class, not even if he had the choice of the prettiest girls in the school to walk home across the fields with him. Not that he was in the habit of swearing at the weaker sex, but he regarded Maud rather as a racing accomplice than as a woman.

And she knew it.

No woman, not even the most degraded of her sex, likes to be treated with disrespect. Chivalry may be extinct, but a woman expects courtesy, though she may talk and write about the emancipation of women from male thraldom; and woe

betide the man, whether he be benedict or bachelor, who is guilty of discourtesy.

But Berkeley did not understand this. He had paid a hundred pounds for certain information, which he had not received. He was Maud's creditor, and expected her to pay the debt.

They were standing at covert-side on the day following the attempted burglary at Slatering Hall. He had been more abusive than usual, and did not notice the angry flush on her cheeks.

"What could you have been about? You had the man in your own house for over a week, and were nursing him, and yet you tell me that you couldn't pump any information out of him. You must be a fool."

"I am a fool, though it is not your business to tell me so. I suppose you want your hundred pounds back."

"I haven't asked you for it. I have only asked you to earn it. By the way, did Pebbles recognise you?"

"I don't know. He did not speak to me. Why do you ask?"

"Because he is *ami intime* at Slatering Hall."

"Which you never will be. Berkeley, I have been thinking that I shall sever the partnership between us."

"Why?"

"Because you are a cad. Of course, I knew that you were a cad when I first saw you: but now, other people recognise you as a cad. You need not frown. You know that I am speaking the truth."

"Then why did you make yourself my tool?"

"Because even cads are useful in this wicked world on occasions. On this occasion you are not useful, for hounds have gone away. Don't ride in my pocket, for the hundred pounds is not there."

"I'd ride over you if I thought for a moment that it was there," Berkeley muttered, as he gave his horse an unnecessary dig with the spurs, a liberty which the animal resented by lifting his hind-quarters in a way which would have unseated a less skilful horseman, but which in Berkeley's case only caused a second edition of the liberty.

Now, it is a well-known axiom amongst hunting-men, that nobody can ride in the first flight unless he is on perfectly good terms with his horse. Berkeley having lost his own temper, proceeded to upset the temper of his mount, who jumped his first fence in a slovenly manner altogether foreign to his usual habits. Berkeley punished him again with the spurs, with the result that the horse, which was never a good-tempered animal at the

best of times, turned vicious, and taking the bit between his teeth, fairly bolted.

Even under the most favourable circumstances, when one is alone in a fair open country, it is not a pleasant sensation to be run away with. But Berkeley's position was absolutely dangerous both to himself and to his neighbours. It happened to be a favourite meet, and there was a large field out, so that even if he could keep his horse's head straight at his fences, Berkeley ran a great risk of charging or cannoning against somebody or other, while if hounds checked he might ride into the middle of them. To make matters worse, his horse was an old steeplechaser, whose idea of hunting seemed to be to race against every other horse.

For the first three fields luck favoured him, though he had more than one narrow escape of a cannon. Maud Lister watched him as he raced past her, and turned pale, for she knew that at the end of the field was a deep lane, which Berkeley must jump into, if he could not pull up.

"Throw yourself off!" she shouted to him as he passed her; but he did not understand the warning till he was within a few yards of the lane, and saw the nature of the obstacle. Then it was too late. The horse rushed madly at it, and clearing

the near side fence, landed with his chest against the bank on the further side of the lane, with such force as to send Berkeley clean into the fence on the top. Then he rolled back into the lane and after one convulsive struggle, lay dead.

It was not long before several good Samaritans came to Berkeley's assistance. Those who had witnessed the jump half expected to find him dead. Like his horse, he had rolled back into the lane, where they found him lying insensible. He was a ghastly sight; his face had been cut to pieces by the fence, and the blood was streaming down; one of his legs lay crushed beneath his body, and his right arm hung listlessly by his side. A hunting doctor was soon on the scene.

"Life isn't extinct, but the right leg and right arm are both broken. It is impossible to say now what other injuries he has sustained. He must have come a fearful cropper. Has anybody got any brandy?"

He forced some brandy down the insensible man's throat, and gave instructions for an *ex tempore* litter to be formed out of a sheep-hurdle, while he endeavoured to restore consciousness. But it was some minutes before Berkeley opened his eyes, and then he was too dazed to comprehend what had happened till his gaze rested on the dead horse.

"Dead?" he asked weakly.

"Yes; but don't worry yourself now. We must get you to the nearest house as quickly as possible."

He attempted to move, but fell back with a groan.

"I feel smashed to atoms."

"Well, you have had a narrow escape. Keep quiet and don't try to move."

With difficulty they managed to place him on the hurdle, and four labourers, keeping step, carried him to a cottage close by. The distance was hardly more than two hundred yards, but every yard of the journey caused Berkeley the most exquisite torture.

Maud Lister followed with the doctor. Her dislike and contempt for Berkeley had now totally disappeared, and were succeeded by that sympathy which every woman feels for suffering. She was the only person present who knew Berkeley; he had made casual acquaintances of course in the hunting-field, but the Listers were the only people in the Hunt, with whom he could be said to be on terms of any intimacy. Maud was puzzled how to act. If the accident had happened near to Brotherton, she would have had him taken to the vicarage; but it had happened close to Penk on the other side of the country.

It seemed cruel to let him be taken to the Slatering Arms, and be left at the mercy of hotel servants.

"I believe Mr Foster is staying at the Slatering Arms, isn't he?" the doctor asked Maud.

"Yes. I would suggest that he should be taken to my father's, if it is not too far."

"Impossible, Miss Lister. As it is, it will be a difficult matter to get him to Penk. I admit a strange hotel is not the most comfortable quarters for an invalid, who most probably will have to undergo an operation."

"An operation?"

"Yes, and a dangerous operation. It is best to tell you the truth. His right leg will, I am sure, have to be amputated; what other injuries he has sustained, I cannot tell till I have made a careful examination."

"Then he will never ride again, and he was such a splendid rider. Poor Berkeley!" And the tears welled up into Maud's eyes, though barely an hour before she had called the injured man a cad.

Mr Spraggs had also followed to the cottage to see if he could be of any assistance, and overheard Maud's remark. He was the soul of good-nature, and he also had a genuine admiration for Maud, which it only required a little encouragement to

turn into a more tender passion. At all events there was hardly anything which he would not do to be of any service to her.

"I have only a bachelor's establishment, but, if you think that your friend would be more comfortable there than at the hotel, I shall be very glad to place it at his disposal. I have an excellent old housekeeper, as you know, who would do all she could in the nursing way."

Maud hesitated, but the doctor cut the matter short.

"If you really mean it, Mr Spraggs, it would be the finest thing; but I must warn you that it will be a long time before Mr Foster will be able to get about again."

"Then, that is settled," Mr Spraggs replied. "Now, how are we to get him there?"

"I must not leave him. If you could send a carriage with plenty of cushions and rugs from the Slatering Arms, it would be the best plan. And—" he added, taking Mr Spraggs aside, "if you will ask my assistant to send some things which I will write down on a piece of paper, I should be immensely obliged. I could not tell you before Miss Lister, but it is doubtful whether this poor fellow will recover."

"Good Heavens! You don't mean to say that he may die?"

"It is far from improbable. I thought it my duty to tell you."

"I will be off at once, and gallop back myself with your things. I shall take less time than the carriage."

The doctor wrote down the list of what he required, and Mr Spraggs galloped off to Penk with it. But before he left, Maud pressed his hand and thanked him warmly.

The doctor watched his patient closely, as he lay in a semi-conscious state. He had bathed the blood off his face, and made him as comfortable as circumstances would permit, until Mr Spraggs returned with the medicines which he had sent for. They were not long, for Mr Spraggs' cob had never been ridden so fast before. The carriage arrived shortly afterwards.

"Now, my dear Miss Lister, had you not better ride home? I can understand your anxiety, but still we cannot learn anything further before the morning. If there were anything that you could do, I would be the first to ask you to come with us, but there really is nothing."

So Maud again thanked Mr Spraggs, and then rode home.

Berkeley was conveyed to Mr Spraggs' vicarage, where instructions had been given for a temporary bedroom or hospital, to be made up in the dining-

room on the ground floor. "It is the warmest and most comfortable room in the house," Mr Spraggs said apologetically to the doctor.

"Mr Spraggs, I have met many charitable people in my time, but you are a perfect ideal of the good Samaritan; it won't be your fault if this man does not recover. I will get him between the sheets and make a diagnosis of his state, in order to see if there are any internal symptoms. There is no doubt that his right leg will have to be amputated; but I must communicate with his own medical adviser. I presume, Miss Lister can tell me his name in the morning."

"I have no doubt, but that she will call here in the morning with her father. They are the only people, to the best of my belief, who know anything about Foster in this neighbourhood. I will send them a telegram the first thing."

"H'm! My assistant has arrived, so I will make my diagnosis. I am afraid one or other of us will have to stay with the patient throughout the night, and I shall have to give instructions to that good old housekeeper."

"Consider my house your own private hospital, doctor. I will not go into the sickroom with you. I should only be in your way, though I am anxious to hear your verdict. I will wait for you in my study."

Mr Spraggs waited, not with impatience, but with anxiety. Berkeley Foster's manner in the hunting-field towards Maud had led other people, besides Mr Spraggs, to consider that there was a private understanding, if not an actual engagement, between them. Mr Spraggs sat and thought. What chance had he, a plain country vicar, against the handsome man, acknowledged to be one of the finest gentleman riders in England?

Courage, Mr Spraggs! You have a better chance with a true woman than all the self-chartered libertines who hide their lascivious longings under a priestly garb, with the sanction of episcopal cowards.

CHAPTER XII

TOLD IN THE TRAIN

DICK PEBBLES had been obliged to return to London on the day following the attempted burglary at Slatering Hall. He had not been able to tell Lord Slatering or Reggie how, when, and where he had met Maud Lister. But a railway journey, uncomfortable as it may be in many respects, is generally prolific of reminiscences. Dick was not one of those hunting enthusiasts, whom we often encounter between Rugby and Euston, who tell one the hunting countries through which we are travelling, and describe the fences with a pedestrian flavour which savours of the Throgmorton Street pink-coated roadster, who has taken a hunting circular ticket. Wonderful gentry are these travelling companions, and wonderful riders to hounds, until you ask them what Hunt they subscribe to. The answer to the last question is generally ambiguous, and the

conversation afterwards becomes as limited as the dialogue between an author and a publisher when the former's manuscript has been returned, with the customary "declined with thanks." Dick listened to one of these hunting enthusiasts, whose enthusiasm generally consists in damaging land and fences without paying for the damage, for twenty minutes. Then he thought that he had seen him before.

"Haven't I met you at Bavigar's?" Dick asked his travelling companion.

"Bavigar's? Yes. You may have. I often go to Bavigar's. You mean the riding-school at West Kensington?"

"Yes," Dick assented.

"I thought I recognised your face. Are you not connected with the press?"

"Yes; though it is not in that connection that I know Bavigar. I am a barrister with a very limited number of clients. Bavigar's solicitor happens to be one of the limited number. I cross-examined you in a case which came on last May. Bavigar *v.* Foster was the name of the case."

"I recollect. Mr Pebbles, I believe?"

"Yes, I am Mr Pebbles. That was an extraordinary case. I was for Bavigar, and you gave evidence on behalf of Foster. If I recollect rightly,

I suggested to the jury that you had been committing perjury."

"But we won the case, Mr Pebbles."

"Because the jury were fascinated by a female witness. My side made a mistake. The average British juryman is a respectable married man, owning a meat-cooking, stout-drinking specimen of the female sex, which he calls his wife, and who annually presents to him a bundle of squalls, which he is supposed to slobber over, until the little beast slobbers over him. Therefore, when the British juryman, released from conjugal obligations, finds himself face to face with a pretty woman in the witness-box, he asks the judge for her address and finds in favour of the side which she favours."

"Then, Mr Pebbles, you think that you ought to have won the case?"

"Undoubtedly. But it was not worth appealing against. I remember your name. Shawblack, isn't it? I forget the name of the lady who won the case for you."

"She was one of Bavigar's girls. I forget her name. But you had better ask Bavigar. To tell you the truth, I have no interest now, either with Bavigar or with Foster, or I should ask you why you try to cross-examine me in a railway carriage."

"And so, Mr Shawblack, may I take it that you will give me information about Berkeley Foster? I am willing to pay you a price."

"You evidently take me for a horse-copper."

"In other words, a thief. Yes, Mr Shawblack, I do consider you to be an unmitigated scoundrel, and I tell you so, because for one reason I could knock you out of this railway compartment without damaging my fist, and for another reason, I can pay you for certain information which I require. We have only twenty minutes before we reach Willesden Junction. Come with me in my cab to Romano's from Euston. Here is a fiver in part settlement."

Dick Pebbles had neither the income nor the inclination to treat casual acquaintances whom he might have met in a railway carriage to dinners at the most fashionable, and the most expensive restaurant in the Strand; but on this occasion he thought that the price of a dinner expended over Mr Shawblack represented money returned with considerable interest into his own pocket. Therefore he ordered the most *récherché* dinner which the prince of Italian *restaurateurs* could serve, coupled with two bottles of Perriet Youet, 1874.

Romano's restaurant has been altered since the days when it was an aristocratic lounge for the racing fraternity. Then it partook of the nature of

a club, where the proprietor charged high prices and gave long credit to his regular customers. Now it partakes of the nature of a West-End restaurant, where the prices are high and the credit a non-existent quantity. But Dick, though a constant customer, was a ready-money man, and his wants were immediately attended to, when he passed through the bar into the dining-room with Shawblack, whose knowledge of the place had hitherto been confined to the consumption of the whisky wine of Scotland.

Dick Peebles understood his guest as well as he did the restaurant, and ordered a dinner which would have met with the approval of a Nero or a Maximus, or any of the other gluttons who ruled over Imperial Rome. But he was a strategist, whereas the rulers of Imperial Rome were autocrats. He did not mention the name of Bavigar till the coffee and liqueurs arrived. Then he said casually:—

"By the way, what did you tell me was the name of that girl who gave evidence in the Bavigar *v.* Foster case?"

"You mean the female witness who fascinated the jury?"

"Yes, Maud something or other."

Mr Shawblack looked at his interrogator; then, to use a vulgar phrase, he winked the other eye.

"Don't bother, dear boy! I can find out all I want to know from Bavigar. You must excuse my leaving you now, for I have an appointment at the Empire, and have to go to the Press Club afterwards."

Dick Pebbles had called for and paid the bill, and the waiter, obsequious on account of the change left on the plate, when the bill was presented, was helping him with his overcoat, after the approved manner of German paupers, who have failed to satisfy the Kaiser's standard of military service.

Dick Pebbles shrugged his shoulders as he watched the eager fingers which seized his loose change.

"I presume that some day in the future, our own English waiters will kick these German, French, and Italian monkeys into the deep blue sea. Good-night, Mr Shawblack."

"Mr Pebbles, I should like to speak to you for a moment."

"Yes, Mr Shawblack, I can only spare you a moment. What is it?"

"I think that I can tell you the name of the lady which you want to know."

"Much obliged; but I know the name of the lady already."

"Then, Mr Pebbles, why did you ask me to dine with you?"

"Because it is my business to study character. I can judge your character, my dear fellow. Don't frown! You know me; and you know that I should fracture your ugly jaw if you were to contradict a word which I said. Now, do we understand each other or do we not?"

"I understand that you want information from me?"

"Which I am not likely to get in Romano's."

"Will you come to my rooms?"

"Not likely, my boy. I will give you a cheque for five pounds, payable the day after to-morrow. If you meet me to-morrow in the smoking-room of Anderton's Hotel at one o'clock, I will redeem the cheque for cash, or rather for information."

"Do you mean this, Pebbles?"

"Shouldn't have made the suggestion otherwise."

"Where can we close the deal?"

"At Anderton's Hotel."

"Is that your haunt, Sonny?"

"Yes. At least you may take it that way."

"A scamp, who would sell his grandmother for the price of a threepenny bill stamp," Dick muttered, as he walked home to his solitary chambers in the Temple.

"A briefless barrister, who has taken to the private detective business as a last resource," Mr Shawblack muttered, as he walked home to a

fifth floor back room in a dirty street off the Edgeware Road.

What a saving of time and labour it would be if we could only see ourselves as others see us.

CHAPTER XIII

MR BAVIGAR EXPLAINS

THE firm of Bavigar & Co. carried on an extensive business on a limited capital. With unlimited knowledge ostensibly they conducted a riding school with the usual livery stables attached; unostensibly they conducted a horse-dealing business on a very large scale. Where they managed to stable their horses was an enigma even to those who were in the same trade. Whatever anybody wanted in the shape of horse-flesh, Bavigar & Co. could supply him with. Whether it were a pair of Royal carriage horses worth five hundred guineas, a two hundred guinea Polo pony, or a covert hack. Indeed, the firm had been known to sell a donkey to the proud parent of a four-year-old maiden for five times the price that the asinine quadruped would have fetched at the knacker's yard. That was how Bavigar & Co. were enabled to pay dividends.

Then their stablemen appeared to be so artless and so full of confidential simplicity, that the customer invariably went away with the idea that he had secured a bargain, forgetting the precept, which had been previously instilled into him, that no amateur ever "bested" a professional dealer. Not that Bavigar & Co. were dishonest, as some of their customers stated. If a man tried to "best" them, they would "best" him, but if a man told them what he wanted and the price he was willing to give for it, they would see that he had it, and make a fair profit out of it. But they sold him the real genuine article.

On the morning after his meeting with Shawblack, Dick Pebbles walked to Bavigar's riding school, and was immediately ushered into Mr Bavigar's private sanctum. A curious place was this sanctum. The most conspicuous article of furniture was a large pedestal writing-table. Adjacent to this was a small sideboard, which contained samples of nearly every known species of alcoholic refreshment from Chateau y quem down to bottled beer. The walls were adorned with artist proof engravings of Waller's pictures and coloured prints of celebrated race-horses. A row of silver cups on the mantelpiece proved Mr Bavigar's success in the show-ring. Two luxurious saddle-bag armchairs invited the confidence of the

prospective customer, while tumblers and wine-glasses of the finest and thinnest glass suggested to the casual observer how the confidence was created. A fire was burning cheerfully in the grate. Altogether it was as cosy a place as a man could wish to be in on a cold wintry morning.

"Glad to see you, Mr Pebbles."

"Are you? Now I haven't come to buy, unless you will sell me something worth two hundred for fifty on the three years' hire system, and stable it free of cost till I have paid off the money. But it must be something good. However, I know you are the most honest dealer in London."

"None of your chaff, Mr Pebbles, though, candidly, I am as honest as I can afford to be."

"Exactly, Bavigar, though you find honesty an expensive commodity."

"And a rare one too, Mr Pebbles."

"I don't doubt you, since you have such funny gentry to deal with. I came up from Penk yesterday, and my travelling companion was Shaw-black, who gave evidence against us in the case we had against Berkeley Foster. By the way, Foster is hunting with the Slatering Hounds, and living at an hotel at Penk. It may be only a coincidence, but that girl, who gave

evidence against us, is the daughter of a hunting parson in the Slatering country."

"I remember her. Artful young minx she was!"

"A clever woman. She means going for the Slatering stakes."

"And you don't want her to win them, eh, Mr Pebbles?"

"I don't mind. Lord Slatering is an old friend of mine, and, naturally, I should not like to see him made a fool of. But the girl is a lady. Now, how the deuce did she get into the power of a cad like Foster?"

"That question is the object of your visit, Mr Pebbles?"

"Yes; I've got my knife into Foster for many reasons. So have you, haven't you?"

"Mr Pebbles, Berkeley Foster is the only man who ever really bested me. Now, as a rule, I am not the man to carry bad blood, but Foster is a downright wrong 'un, as you know."

"I only know through my brief, or I should have warned Lord Slatering against him."

"Yes; I know a barrister's instructions are confidential, though I confess that if I were a barrister and received information that a man was a scoundrel, I should be inclined to borrow some of your morality, Mr Pebbles, as Charles Surface says."

"Didn't know that you were a student of Sheridan."

"Probably not. You don't know everything, Mr Pebbles; why, I've got a stable lad at seven shillings a week, whom I found in the loft one afternoon reading Byron, when he ought to have been grooming down a horse. That comes of the board schools. Now I've got a baronet's son in the stables. If his father hadn't come a cropper and taken the knock at Tattersall's, the boy would have been at Eton. As it is, he is the best boy in the stable. I have to treat them all alike; but the missis does what she can for him. Blood will tell, whether it be horses or human beings. Now, this Berkeley Foster came the wrong side of the sheets."

"I rather guessed that his paternity was doubtful."

"Then you guessed wrong. His father is Mr Lister, the vicar of Brotherton, and Maud Lister is his half sister. I do not know the name of his mother; she must be dead now."

"Can you give me chapter and verse for this?"

"Certainly, Mr Pebbles, in confidence—that is to say, barristerial confidence. Mr Lister, when he was an undergraduate at Christ Church, Oxford, was, to say the least of it, somewhat rapid. You

know that rapid undergraduates can soon find a skirt."

"Yes," Dick assented, having recollections of the many skirts which he had managed to find.

"So you see Mr Lister got hung up by a girl. She was—well, you know what girls in Oxford are. Ladies, or gutter pups, they are all the same."

"I comprehend. Berkeley Foster was the result of the undergraduate connection, and then Lister married somebody else and Maud came on the scenes."

"Exactly."

"How was Berkeley Foster educated?"

"Now you ask me a difficult question to answer, Mr Pebbles. He was educated as a gentleman, at all events, and you know what he is now."

"No; that is what I do not know, and what I want to know. Lord Slatering is training some chasers, and Foster, as far as I can gather, is trying to mug-roll the stable."

"Working the starting price game, eh! Well, that game is pretty well played out, so far as the illegitimate season is concerned."

"I don't know so much about that. Now, what I want to know, Bavigar, is this. What harm could Foster do to the Slatering stable?"

"None that I can think of, for this simple reason,

that these chasers are seldom backed for big amounts. I was talking to the editor of the principal sporting paper in London only last week, and he was telling me that he knew of cases where jockeys had been bribed to ride against each other at their fences. I've seen that trick played; but how can it be played now? The thing is impossible. Go to any steeplechase meeting and you will see men walking about the course, watching one jump one race, and another jump another race. These men are experienced sporting journalists, who are paid more than the racing reporters in the ring."

"I know. I've done the work."

"Then you know that foul riding, if not an impossibility, is reduced to a fine science. Of course I do not know Foster's scheme. He is clever enough to invent something new, if anything new in the shape of turf frauds can be invented."

"How has he got his money? He appears to have plenty of ready cash."

"Well, as you know, he got some out of me, and I am conceited enough to think that I am not easily done in the horse-coping business. When you can buy a horse for fifty, and sell him for two hundred guineas you soon turn over money."

"Especially when you can find a pretty woman to ride him."

"That's it. The women know how to work the oracle better than the men do. Now, unless a horse has some distinctive mark, it is wonderful how different he looks when he is carrying a lady to what he does when he is carrying a man. Of course, the lady must know how to ride, and Miss Lister does know. You see, every man who rides to hounds, thinks that he is a judge of a horse, that's why he gets taken in. I'll give you an instance. There was a horse called Playman, a bright chestnut with three white stockings, supposed to be the best horse that ever crossed Leicestershire. He was sold at Tattersall's for four hundred and fifty guineas, and anybody could read about the sale in the papers. But Tattersall's object to the papers publishing the names of the purchasers, so only a few people knew who had bought Playman. At the time Foster owned a weedy brute, a bright chestnut with three white stockings, so he names him Playman, and gets Miss Lister to ride him somewhere down in Hampshire, where he had marked down a greenhorn. The result was that the greenhorn gave five hundred for a beast which would have been dear at a pony."

"But Miss Lister couldn't ride in that country again."

"You would think not, but then a woman gets

forgiven for a thing which they would prosecute me for doing. Besides, the greenhorn would only get laughed at by his friends, who would tell him he had been done by a woman."

"And Foster's name did not appear in the transaction?"

"You can bet about that. Now, Shawblack can tell you more about Foster than I can. I fancy that they were schoolfellows or something of the sort. But, mind, although I am certain that Foster is an illegitimate son of Mr Lister, I do not know whether Foster is aware of the fact. I am inclined to think that he does not know about it, for he has never treated Miss Lister, as if she were his sister. I am positive that Miss Lister does not know about the relationship."

"But you think that Shawblack can throw some light on the subject?"

"Yes; but be cautious with him, Mr Pebbles. He is a deep hand."

"I always understood that he was one of the boys."

"I won't say that, for I don't think that he has got the common pluck to join them. He's a bad hat, Mr Pebbles. Now, I don't pretend to be a religious man, and I don't understand religious controversies. Some people preach that there is neither a heaven nor a hell. Well, all I can say

is, that if there ain't no hell, there ought to be one, and, if I bossed the show, I should let men like Shawblack have a few extra cinders. They've done others, so ought to be well done themselves."

"You've missed your vocation, Bavigar. You ought to have edited the last edition of Dante. Well, I must be off to meet this candidate for Satanic honours. I suppose you would like to know the result?"

"Certainly; take my advice and bully the little thief."

"I will," Dick answered.

CHAPTER XIV

FURTHER REVELATIONS

PROBABLY in no sphere of life are there so many failures, both social and financial, as in the world of sport. It seems so easy to make money amongst a sport-loving people. Yet where one succeeds, ninety-nine fail, and, in common parlance, go under. Sometimes they go abroad and turn up again in a few years as millionaires, or reputed millionaires; but these are only the men with a strong sense of shame. The majority cling to the fringe of sporting society. They loaf about West-End drinking bars on the chance of picking up a greenhorn. They are to be seen sauntering outside the offices of third-rate sporting newspapers on the chance of getting an odd job. They attend Tattersall's, where they get an occasional commission to bid for men like Bavigar. They are to be found on racecourses, acting as clerks or touts to silver-ring book-makers. They are to

be found everywhere and anywhere except in regular honest employment.

Shawblack was a good specimen of his class. How he managed to eat, drink, and dress was a marvel, for he belonged to the West-End species, and was obliged to dress well, and have loose silver in his pocket. He was well-educated and good-looking, but he had lost *caste* and was never likely to recover it.

He was punctual in keeping his appointment with Dick Pebbles at Anderton's Hotel. He had no idea what might be the information which Dick required, but he had had one fiver and held a cheque for another. It would be funny if Shawblack could not supply any information which was required at that price, though he knew that Dick was far from being an artless customer. Being before his time, he picked up the *Daily Telegraph* and glanced casually through "London Day by Day," of which the final paragraphs generally refer to fox-hunting. His surprise may easily be understood when he read the following:—

"Yesterday, while hunting with the Slatering Hounds, Mr Berkeley Foster met with a serious accident. His horse bolted with him and jumped a fence into a deep lane, called Sandy Lane, about three miles from Penk. The horse was killed on the spot, and Mr Foster received injuries which

proved to be dangerous, though it is hoped that they will not prove to be fatal. Both his right leg and right arm were broken, and his face was badly cut, and it is feared that he has suffered internal injuries. Medical assistance was quickly at hand, and the unfortunate gentleman was conveyed to Slatering Vicarage, the residence of Mr Spraggs."

Callous as he was, even Shawblack was shocked, and, to his credit be it said, deeply sorry, though he had lately quarrelled with Foster. His first impulse was to go down to Penk, and he called for the A B C, and was studying the trains when Dick Pebbles came into the smoking-room.

"Have you seen the news about Foster? If not, read this."

Pebbles took the paper and read the paragraph.

"It doesn't look as if he would be likely to worry you or any of your friends for some time. Poor devil! He must have come a frightful purler. I was thinking of going down to see him."

"I understood that you had quarrelled with him."

"Yes; as men in our position quarrel. He called me a blackmailer. Well, I did try to get a bit out of him. But we were schoolfellows, and I should like to make it up with him."

"Perhaps you had better, for I doubt if Foster knows who his father is."

"He does not know, for he would have asked Maud Lister to marry him, if it had not been for my interference. That was about the only honest action that I ever did in my life. But if I were to tell him now, what good would it do?"

"But won't Mr Lister tell him?"

"Mr Lister doesn't know. Foster's mother was my aunt, and when he was born she gave out that he was still-born and put him out to nurse. Her motive for doing this was that her family had offered to forgive her and welcome her back home, and naturally she wished that there should be no evidence of her past. She subsequently married a Mr Herbert, whose son is now Lord Slatering's agent."

"So Berkeley Foster and Mr Reginald Herbert are half-brothers."

"Exactly. Mr Herbert had Berkeley educated and started him in life, though Berkeley never knew who his patron was. Mrs Herbert had confessed everything to her husband before her marriage. That is the true story of Berkeley Foster."

"How came you to know this?"

"My mother told me on her deathbed. Mrs Herbert was dead, so was Mr Herbert; and my mother asked me to look after Berkeley for her

sake and the sake of my aunt, but not to reveal his identity to him, unless I thought that it was absolutely necessary. I have got the documents now."

"Do you mean to tell me that your mother asked you to look after Foster?"

"Yes. It sounds strange, but it's the truth. Berkeley was a year younger than I was, and was on the road to becoming what I am now, a hanger-on of the turf, while I was a respectable member of society."

"You don't seem to have obeyed your mother's wishes?"

"That is an ungenerous speech, Mr Pebbles; nor is it true, for I kept Berkeley straight, so far that nothing wrong has ever been proved against him. I am not going to defend myself. It would be no good, for the world has already given its verdict against me."

"I apologise. I did not mean to be ungenerous, nor to force your confidence. Perhaps your position is not so irreclaimable as you imagine it to be. The question now is whether or not it is advisable to disclose this story."

"That is the question. What is your advice?"

"Well, it's rather a delicate matter for me to give an opinion upon. Nor have I any right to interfere, except as a personal friend of Mr

Reginald Herbert. I will tell him the story if you like."

"But Foster may die in the meantime. Shall I see Mr Lister? I could go down this afternoon with the documents. Do you know this Mr Spraggs?"

"Yes. If you decide to go down, I will give you a letter of introduction to him. He is a man whom you can thoroughly trust. I will also give you a letter of introduction to Mr Reginald Herbert. I would come down with you, but I have important business engagements which prevent my leaving town. I will write the letters now, if you decide to go."

"Then I'll go. I have no business engagements unfortunately, so time does not mean money to me, and I may as well live at Penk for two or three days as in London. I can think the matter over in the train, and see how things look, when I get to Penk. In any case, had I not better see Mr Reginald Herbert?"

"Certainly. He is Foster's half-brother, and ought to know the relationship. In addition to the letter of introduction, I will write a private letter to him, if you will deliver it."

"You won't give me away, Mr Pebbles."

"You shall read the letter," Dick answered. "How long will it take you to go home, get the

documents, pack your portmanteau, and be back here?"

"A good two hours, for I live off the Edgeware Road."

"It's 1.30 now. Be at the Cheshire Cheese by four. We will have some food, and then you can catch the 6.30 from Euston to Penk. I will have the letters ready. I will give you the money for that cheque now, if you like."

Dick paid the money, and Shawblack was soon on his way to the Edgeware Road as fast as a hansom could take him, while Dick went to his chambers to write the letters of introduction, and to ponder over the story which he had heard. Not that it was a strange story. Similar romances come to light every day, and are published in the daily papers for the delight of the editors of so-called Society journals, who send round their special backstairs' correspondents to discover further particulars from flunkeys and lady's maids, so that their readers may learn how many lumps of sugar the heroine of the scandal takes in her matutinal cup of coffee.

Shawblack returned punctual to time, received his letters, ate his dinner, and caught the 6.30 train to Penk.

And to Penk it is necessary to follow him.

CHAPTER XV

THE END OF NEWGATE

MR NEWGATE was ill at ease. The burglary at Slatering Hall had been a failure, and Sam Parsons had escaped in a manner, which the local police did not hesitate to call suspicious. The inference was that he had been allowed to escape by his captors for giving information about his confederate or confederates. So the police said, and, as we know, for once in criminal history the inference of the local police happened to be correct. The inference was a matter of public gossip in Penk. The local superintendent maintained a discreet silence, savouring of mystery, which made the inhabitants think that he had a clue and could put the handcuffs on the confederate, whenever he thought fit to do so. This opinion was freely expressed in the bar parlour of the Slatering Arms, and, of course, reached the ears of Mr Newgate. Now, conscience makes

cowards of us all, so Mr Newgate, in spite of his inflexible character, felt that he was regarded as the guilty culprit. He fancied that people looked at him with suspicious eyes, and felt like a ticket-of-leave man, who has failed to report himself, when he meets a policeman. Then also he had Major Herbert on his hands, who was suffering from chronic alcoholic imbecility. The open rupture between the Major and Reggie rendered the value of the Major's complicity in any turf fraud absolutely nugatory. Foster was lingering between life and death, but, if he lived, it was improbable that he would conspire against Lord Slatering after Mr Spraggs' hospitality. Again, Stubbs had openly declared that he could prove that Newgate had been criminally implicated in the poaching on the Slatering estates. It might have been an empty boast founded on mere suspicion, or Stubbs might have evidence, but in either case Mr Newgate knew that he would be sent to Coventry in the hunting-field, and probably also in Penk. Canary, the landlord of the Slatering Arms, had told him that his company was distasteful to the majority of the customers, and Canary had once been his friend, but then rats desert a sinking ship. The greatest grief, however, to Mr Newgate was that he would be obliged to forego his vengeance against Lord

Slatering. He had interpreted his dismissal as an act of *malice prépense* on the part of the new lord, and hated him accordingly. Few things disease a mind more rapidly than the sense of a fancied wrong. That Mr Newgate's mind was diseased may be gathered from the fact that he did not run away while the coast was clear.

He sat pondering over his position during the evening which witnessed Shawblack's arrival at Penk. Opposite to him sat the Major in a querulous maudlin state of intoxication.

"You haven't spoken for an hour, Newgate. What the deuce is the matter with you?"

"I was wishing that I had let you go away with your detestable nephew to the Slatering Arms."

"I wish that I had gone, for you are not a cheerful companion. However, I can go now. It won't take me long to pack up my traps, and it's only nine o'clock. Damme, sir, I won't stay here to be insulted."

"Just as you please. I suppose it is a matter of indifference to you where you stay, so long as you get sufficient brandy."

But the Major had left the room. His portmanteau was soon packed, and, telling a servant he would send up for it from the hotel, he left the house.

"Another rat deserted the sinking ship. Halloa! What do you want?"

"Beg pardon, sir, but being told that you would not hunt again, I thought I had better look out for another situation."

The speaker was Newgate's groom, a man whom he had trained from being a rough hobble-de-hoy into being a gentleman's servant. Newgate looked at him with undisguised contempt.

"Who told you that I did not mean to hunt any more?"

"Well, sir, everybody says as how Mr Thornton won't allow you in the field, and that Lord Slatering intends to prosecute you. I'd rather leave before the prosecution comes off."

"And I suppose the other servants will follow your example?"

"Yes, sir. They are outside in the hall now."

"Tell them to come in, then."

The man did as he was told, and the other servants, headed by the cook, filed into the room. The scene was impressive. Newgate's establishment was not an extensive one, but on this occasion it was evidently a very determined one.

"So you wish to give notice to leave!"

"No, we doesn't. We wish to leave at once without giving no notice whatsoever," the cook answered.

"You know that you have no legal right to do so, unless you forfeit a month's wages to me. I have the power to detain your luggage until you pay the money."

"I know and care nothing about your legal right, but I does know that all our luggage was out of this house a good half-hour ago. So there! You can take it out of that. And we doesn't mean to apply to you for our characters, either, and you needn't send for us to give evidence as to your character in a court of law, either." And the cook placed her arms akimbo, and glared at her late master.

"Drunk, I perceive," Newgate observed.

"Never you mind whether I'm drunk or sober," the cook replied, who had a reputation for oratory in the kitchen, and had boasted that she would give "old skinflint," as she termed her master, a piece of her mind, and was not going to be stopped by anything short of the Falls of Niagara. "I didn't get drunk on your liquor, anyway." (This was not the strict truth.) "You can keep that for your dupes, like the poor old Major. We're honest servants, and like to live with an honest master, and not with a felon. It's men like you who ruin us."

"You need not waste any more of your breath. You can all go."

"We can all go! Hoity-toity! Did anybody

ever hear of such impudence. We can all go! My word! I should think we can all go."

"But he may not be able to go, cook," the groom interposed.

"No, and he won't be able to go, except to the police station. A pretty man to talk about his legal right, indeed! Why—"

But Newgate was a strong man. One blow sent the groom staggering through the door into the hall, and in less time than it takes to narrate, he had bundled the women servants out after him, and had opened the front door.

"Out you get, and quick too, you bundle of ungrateful swine, and let me never set eyes on you again!"

The groom took the hint and went. The women, deprived of their only male supporter, followed his example. Newgate banged the door to after them and returned to his room. He was now alone in the house.

Up and down the room he paced for over an hour, alone, deserted by even his meanest dependents, who had denounced him to his face as a felon. Twice he picked up his revolver meditating suicide. He even pictured to himself the scene which would take place when his dead body was discovered. He imagined and laughed aloud, as he imagined the horror of the discoverers. Then

he filled a tumbler half full of neat brandy, which he drank at a draught. The raw spirit seemed to revive him, and he replaced the revolver in his pocket.

"I'll keep you for the last emergency," he said aloud, for there was no need to mutter in an empty house. "The police won't come for me now at this time of night. Now to collect all my portable property. I have been called a miser. Well, I suppose I am one, if a miser is a man who likes to gaze upon his wealth, and I can put two-thirds of my wealth in my pockets."

The deserted man gathered together his valuables, consisting chiefly of bullion, five-pound Bank of England notes, and precious stones. These he secreted about his person in a way, which showed that he had often contemplated and rehearsed his present plan.

"It's a pity to leave the furniture behind, and the horses. Lord Slatering will probably get them in forfeiture of my lease. By Heaven, he shan't though. I will burn the whole place down, and then he will loose his house into the bargain. Good old brandy, for giving me that idea. I thought you were only good enough to drug fools with, but you've got some inspiration left in you."

He proceeded to the accomplishment of his diabolical plan. He saturated the carpets with paraffin

oil, and scattered all his stock of cartridges about. Then he surveyed the result with satisfaction.

"They will think that I have perished in the ruins. Now for the stables. No; the horses shan't perish. They have done me no harm, poor brutes. I will let them loose to take care of themselves."

This he promptly did. Every man, even in his worst moments, has some redeeming point in his character. Let it be put down to Newgate's credit, that he saved the lives of his horses.

"It's a dark dry night, with sufficient wind to fan the flames. How they will burn and cackle and illuminate the country for miles round! They will send the fire-engine from Penk, when the place is burnt to the ground. Now for it!"

He struck a match and in less than five minutes the interior of the house was ablaze. Within twenty minutes the flames were shooting through the windows, and the outbuildings were on fire. Newgate gazed at his handiwork for a few moments from a distance of about a quarter-of-a-mile from the fire, laughed, then struck across country, and Penk knew him no more.

But Sam Parsons knew him again. Sam had been hiding in the neighbourhood since his little escapade at Slatering Hall, for he guessed rightly that the immediate neighbourhood would be the

very last place where the police would search for him. So, while the police were telegraphing his description all over England, Sam was within seven miles of Penk, staying indoors during the day, and going out at night for a little sporting exercise, as he facetiously termed it. Now, Sam, being out for his nocturnal exercise and seeing the skies illuminated by a fire, soon came to the conclusion where the fire was, for his experiences had given him the ability to judge distance accurately during the night-time. A little thought enabled him to locate the fire at Newgate's house, and then Sam began to meditate how the fire could have arisen. How long the meditations might have lasted, it is impossible to guess, if they had not been interrupted by the sound of a heavy footfall. Sam being of a modest disposition hid himself by the side of the hedge, and awaited further developments. The footfall was caused by Newgate.

"Police on his track, committed arson, and bolted with all that he could carry. Better game this than pheasants."

Such was Sam's comment, as he proceeded to stalk Newgate, till he could catch him in a quiet place. This was not difficult, for Newgate wished to avoid publicity as much as Sam did, so he struck off from the road up a narrow lane,

bordered on both sides by high hedges. Sam hurried after him, his silent shoes preventing Newgate from hearing his approach. But Sam had to be cautious: his right wrist was useless, and he knew Newgate to be a strong man. Grasping his knife he sprang at Newgate and buried it between his left ribs.

The murdered man fell back without a groan.

Sam was now in his element. His practised fingers soon relieved Newgate of his valuables. But Sam was astounded when he saw their worth. The jewellery he could not value, but the money alone amounted to over twenty thousand pounds. He took the dead man's revolver and rolled the body into the ditch at the side of the lane.

Now, Sam had not expected that his booty would amount to more than five hundred pounds, in which case he would have returned to his present hiding-place. But the magnitude of the booty made him change his plans, for he dare not trust the pals, who were hiding him, with twenty thousand pounds. Yet, what was he to do? He had no disguise, and to be seen in his present dress meant certain detection. In his perplexity he glanced at his victim, and was seized with an idea. The ditch was dry and had not damaged the dead man's clothes. Why should he not steal the clothes as well as the money? In another

hour he was dressed in Newgate's clothes, with Newgate's money in the pockets, and walked boldly away from the scene of his crime.

When the corpse of Newgate was eventually discovered there was little difficulty in identifying the old clothes beside it as belonging to Sam Parsons. A coroner's jury brought in a verdict of wilful murder against Parsons, and a reward was offered for his arrest. But the reward was never earned. Sam took a berth on an outward bound ship, which went down off the Lizard. So judgment cannot be pronounced upon him till the sea gives up its dead.

CHAPTER XVI

FIRST COUSINS

BERKELEY FOSTER was still lying on the borderland between life and death, when Shawblack arrived at Penk, and called at Mr Spraggs with Dick Pebbles' letter of introduction. Mr Spraggs related all that the reader already knows about the accident.

"He is still unconscious, Mr Shawblack. Doctor Blank came down from London to see him this morning. He says that the right leg will have to be amputated as soon as he is able to bear the operation. The right arm also is broken, but he thinks that that can be set. Unfortunately there is also concussion of the brain, but I am thankful to say that the doctors cannot discover any internal injuries, so they give hopes that he may pull through, for he appears to have an iron constitution."

"Yes, he has; I've known him since he was a

boy. In fact, we were at school together. Muscularly, also, he is as strong as a lion, for he has always kept himself in hard condition for riding purposes."

"I am very glad to hear it, and I am very glad that you have come down to see him, Mr Shawblack, for with the sole exception of a Mr and Miss Lister, he has no friends in these parts. Mr Lister cannot tell me anything about his relations."

"Yet he has relations in these parts, though he does not know that they are his relations. Mr Foster has a peculiar family history. By the way, I have a letter of introduction from Mr Pebbles to Mr Reginald Herbert. It is too late to deliver it to-night. What would be the best time to catch him in the morning?"

"H'm! to-morrow is a hunting day. Is it very important?"

"Most important. I have also another letter for him from Mr Pebbles of a private and confidential nature, though I am aware of the contents. I assure you that they are of far more importance than hunting."

"In that case could you be at Slatering Hall by nine o'clock in the morning?"

"Certainly; if you will allow me, I will call here

on my way to learn what sort of a night Mr Foster has passed."

"By all means, Mr Shawblack. I am an early riser. Will you breakfast with me at 7.30? I wish that I could offer you a bed, but my space is limited."

"My dear sir, as it is, I do not know how to thank you sufficiently for all your kindness to my old schoolfellow. I shall be glad to accept your kind invitation to breakfast, though I must call upon Mr Lister and thank him too. How far is it to Brotherton Vicarage?"

"A long drive. They call it ten miles. But I could lend you my cob. Do you know Mr Lister?"

"He knows me," Shawblack answered significantly.

"And Miss Lister?"

"I know her," Shawblack replied in the same tone as before.

"There was a rumour that she was engaged to Mr Foster. May I ask if there is any truth in it?"

Shawblack laughed.

"About as much truth as there would be in a rumour that I was engaged to a royal princess. Love, let alone marriage, between them is a sheer impossibility. Contradict the rumour, Mr Spraggs.

Both of them, to my knowledge, are fancy free. That is so far as anybody can have any knowledge of other people's love affairs."

Mr Spraggs could have embraced his visitor. Never before in his life had he received such welcome news. It was impossible for Shawblack not to notice his joy. But he was discreetly silent on the subject, and shaking hands cordially with Mr Spraggs, left the house. Seldom before had two men so opposite in character met, and parted with such good opinions of each other.

On the next morning Shawblack came punctually to the vicarage at the time mentioned for breakfast, though he had been kept awake during the greater part of the night by the commotion caused by the fire at Newgate's house. Mr Spraggs could talk of nothing else, and gave his guest a full account of the late steward.

"I will walk with you to Slatering Hall, Mr Shawblack. I must see his lordship. This Newgate is missing, and, according to the firemen, the fire looks like a case of arson."

"I shall be very pleased to have your company. You keep early hours in the country, for a gentleman is coming up your drive now."

Mr Spraggs looked out of the window.

"The very gentleman you wish to see—Mr Reginald Herbert." And Mr Spraggs hurried to

the door to welcome his early visitor, whom he introduced to Shawblack, little guessing that the two men were first cousins.

"I have a letter of introduction to you from Mr Pebbles, and a private letter from him to give to you, the contents of which will surprise and may shock you. Pardon me, if I advise you to read them alone before discussing them with me, for they are of vital interest, both to you and to the unconscious man upstairs."

"Go into my study, Reggie. Mr Shawblack has not told me what his business is with you, but I gathered last night that it was extremely important."

Wondering what could have happened in the short time, since he had parted from Dick Pebbles, to cause him to send a special messenger, Reggie went into the study and opened the letter. Though expressed differently, the contents were in substance the information which Shawblack had communicated to Dick. Reggie was astounded. His mother had died when he was a child, and he hardly remembered her; but, how was it that his father had never told the Major about Foster, and how was it that Mr Lister did not know that his old light-o'-love had married Mr Herbert?

Shawblack gave Reggie half-an-hour in which to digest the contents of the letter; then he

knocked at the study door, and in answer to Reggie's "Come in," entered the room.

"According to Mr Pebbles, Mr Shawblack, you are my first cousin. How is it that we have never met before?"

"My mother did not wish it. You can understand her reasons. Nor was it necessary. Your father after his marriage wished to have as little to do as he could with his wife's family. He gave Berkeley ten thousand pounds when he came of age, anonymously. To the best of my knowledge he never saw Berkeley in his life. Berkeley was told that he was educated by his guardian, and was left this money by his guardian, but that the guardian was abroad, and had died abroad. He does not know to this hour who he is. Let me show you the documentary evidence."

Shawblack showed Reggie the documents which proved beyond all doubt the truth of the story.

"Why do you tell me this now?" Reggie asked.

"I thought Mr Pebbles had answered that question in his private letter to you. Your half-brother is on what may be his deathbed. I believe that the reason why he came down to Penk was to gain information about the Slatering stable, for he is a man who knows how to make money out of such information. However, he is *hors de combat* now; and the question is whether or not

you should tell him what is the real relationship between you. Look over those documents carefully and immediately, for there is no time to be lost. Berkeley passed an uneasy night and may not live through the day. You understand my meaning. The next question is whether the Listers should be informed. Do not answer in a hurry! Mr Spraggs has offered me the loan of his cob, and I can ride over to Brotherton and ask them to come here at once on important business, without mentioning the business."

"Yes, I wish that you would do so. If they are not at home they would be out hunting. Find them in the hunting-field and bring them here, even if hounds are running into their fox. Spraggs will give you a note to them, which I guarantee will bring them. Do you have any objection to taking Spraggs and Lord Slatering into our confidence? They are my best friends and best advisers in these parts."

"Certainly not. You know how to act. I will go and find the Listers and bring them here as soon as I can."

Within twenty minutes Shawblack was on his way to Brotherton, and Mr Spraggs' cob doubtless wondered, why he for the second time within three days had been pushed along the high road at a pace which he was seldom called upon to go, even

when hounds were in front of him. But Shawblack was in earnest. He may have been a scamp, but there was good left in him, and he wished to bring out the good.

Perhaps simple, good-natured Mr Spraggs had had something to do with the wish. Perhaps it was only the healthy exhilaration of the morning ride, which acted as a tonic after the vitiated atmosphere of West-End drinking bars. *Cui bono* to inquire? The wish was there, and that is sufficient for the purposes of this story. It is for the moralist, not the novelist, to discuss the arguments relating to individual influence and climatic influence upon social morality.

When Shawblack arrived at Brotherton Vicarage, he found that Mr Lister and Maud had just started for the meet, which was five miles distant. The time was then 10.30.

"Rough on you, my boy," Shawblack said, as he patted the cob's neck. "Especially, if hounds have found, for we shall have to follow them."

The cob shook his head. He might be slow but he was as hard as nails, and willing. If he were treated kindly he would tear his heart out, before he would stop.

Nothing is more aggravating to the stranger in a hunting country than to be told that the distance from one point to another point is so

many miles. How in the name of the Geographical Society is he to know how to get from point to point, unless he knows every bridle-path in the country? Shawblack had never ridden in the Slatering country before, so that when he was told to take the first gate after passing Smith's gorse, turn to the left by Robinson's pond, and take a short cut over the fields to Brown's farm, by Jones' Manor House, he thanked his informant, obeyed the first injunction, and then rode off in the opposite direction. Of course he soon saw his mistake, but at the same time saw no means of rectifying it.

"If hounds don't come to us we shall not come to hounds, old man, that's a dead cert." he confided to his cob, as he stopped to look at the line of country. "A nice position to be in. A strange country and a strange horse, and a strange lady to be found, with a strange papa. Never mind! It's not the worst side of the covert that I have been placed in before now." So ruminated Shawblack, as he alighted from Mr Spraggs' cob on a gentle eminence, from which he could overlook the country. "We will rest here awhile, my noble steed, as the hero says in transpontine melodrama, until the chase goes by. Hope we shan't head the fox! Gently, my noble steed. '*Ille equus, ille meos in castra reponit amores,*' as

old Propertius used to say. '*Furit altaque jactat.*' You'll jacket me out of the saddle, if you don't keep quiet."

This last remark was perfectly true, for the cob had heard the horn, a fact which he evinced plainly to his rider by raising his hindquarters, and placing his head between his forelegs. Shawblack sat tight in the saddle, but he lost the cigar he was smoking. It has been calculated that the cigars found in the hunting-field, when hounds have gone away, would supply the inmates of our workhouses with tobacco for a year. But it is not our province to deal with the tobacco trade. Hounds had come to Shawblack, and Shawblack had to follow them.

CHAPTER XVII

A DISAGREEABLE CONFERENCE

LIKE Mr Pebbles on a former occasion, Shawblack found himself in the first flight, a position which Mr Spraggs' cob did not often enjoy. But he evidently meant to do his best to remain there, and jumped the first fence with plenty to spare, a feat which nearly sent his rider over his head. Over the next two fences, he absolutely led the field, but the third fence proved too much for him. There was a big ditch on the landing side, and he jumped short. Shawblack fell clear, but the cob slipped back into the ditch.

But it's an ill wind that blows no good. Shawblack was looking pitifully at the cob as he struggled to get on to *terra firma*, and wondering how Mr Spraggs would regard his explanation of the accident, if any harm had happened to the horse, when Maud Lister jumped the fence some twenty yards away, and saw his predicament. She

had recognised the cob before, when Shawblack joined the hounds, and had wondered who his rider was. Now she recognised the rider, and pulled up to come to his assistance.

"What are you doing here?"

"Galloping half over the country to find you and your father. I've got a note for you from Mr Spraggs. You are both wanted immediately at his vicarage. My instructions are to bring you, even if hounds were running into their fox. Where is your father?"

"Here he is."

As she spoke, Mr Lister, who always tried, though seldom succeeded, to keep near his daughter in the hunting-field, arrived upon the scene.

"Hulloa! what's this? Accident! Spraggs' cob! Never mind! Mud never brakes bones. I know your face, sir?"

"Mr Shawblack, father."

"Oh yes, I remember. A friend of Berkeley Foster."

"Exactly, and I've been galloping all over the place to try and find you and Miss Lister," Shawblack replied pettishly. "I went to Brotherton Vicarage and was told that you had just started to the meet, so followed on and came this infernal

cropper. I hope the gee isn't hurt. He seems all right."

"You needn't worry about that. That cob is far too clever to hurt himself, when he does fall."

"Mr Spraggs has sent a note for us, father. He wants us to come to Slatering Vicarage immediately."

"What? Is Berkeley worse?"

"Neither better nor worse. He is still unconscious. It is in connection with business affairs that Mr Spraggs, or rather Mr Reginald Herbert, wishes to see you."

"Mr Reginald Herbert, Lord Slatering's secretary! What can he want with me?"

"I don't know. Had you not better come and see? Whoa, old man! You're none the worse, that's a comfort. I suppose you know the way, for it's more than I do."

"I know every fence in the country, sir," Mr Lister replied with asperity, for he resented Shawblack's tone of speaking.

"It would have been a good thing for Berkeley, if he had had your knowledge," Shawblack retorted, who only regarded Mr Lister as the dissipated undergraduate grown old, and had little respect for him accordingly. "By the way, how long have you known Berkeley?"

"For several years. Are you an old friend of his?"

"We were at school together. I am also his first cousin. His mother and mine were sisters."

"Indeed! it is curious that I have never heard Berkeley speak of his family, long as I have known him."

"Because he knows nothing about his family. He does not even know that I am his relation. He was educated by a gentleman, who acted as his guardian, though his father was, and is, still living. His mother has been dead for many years."

"Dear me! it sounds like a romance."

"It was and is a tragedy."

Maud was listening anxiously. She had been wondering what had brought Shawblack down into that part of the country, and was annoyed at the tone which he adopted towards her father, for there was a covert sneer in his voice which implied, as plainly as words, that the present errand would prove far from pleasant to Mr Lister, and made her feel uncomfortable in her own mind.

"You speak in enigmas, Mr Shawblack."

"Do I? Well, the riddle will soon be solved."

Both Maud and Mr Lister looked inquiringly at Shawblack.

"I see that you want me to solve the riddle. It has little to do with you, Miss Lister, except

that it explains my conduct on a certain occasion, when you and Berkeley were on the eve of falling in love with each other. You may thank me now for preventing what might have been a marriage. It was one of the few good deeds that I have done in my life. Still you ought to love him."

"You are impertinent, sir," Mr Lister said angrily.

"On the contrary; I am extremely pertinent, and if you don't adopt a more apologetic tone, old man, your grey hairs won't protect you. Mr Reginald Herbert has the right to hound you out of the country."

"What do you mean?"

"His mother was known as Miss Reginald at Oxford."

Maud had listened with alarm to these angry words, which was increased when she saw her father suddenly turn pale and nearly fall off his horse.

"Why do you bully an old man?"

"Ask the old man! I should advise him to take a pull at his flask before he answers you, for his nerves seem shaken."

Mr Lister took the hint, and tried to brace himself together.

"Is this indiscretion of my Oxford days to be made public property?"

"I can't say. Herbert was going to consult Lord Slatering and Mr Spraggs when I left, so I suppose he will act on their advice. I should have kept the knowledge to myself, if it were not possible that Berkeley might die."

The truth flashed across Maud's brain.

"Then Berkeley is my half-brother?"

"Yes."

"It can't be. Miss Reginald declared to me that her child was still-born."

"Because she didn't want the child to know his father. I can show you documents, which prove beyond all doubt that Berkeley is your son. As yet, he does not know. When he recovers consciousness it will be your duty to tell him."

Little more was said on the road, for Mr Lister and Maud were too much occupied with their own thoughts to pay any regard to Shawblack. Now that they had learnt Foster's identity, a hundred facts, trivial in themselves, occurred to them which placed Shawblack's story beyond doubt. Mr Lister recalled various little mannerisms of Foster, which had reminded him at the time of Miss Reginald. Maud could now detect a resemblance between him and her father, she even fancied that unconsciously she and Foster had obeyed the laws of nature, and had regarded each other as brother

and sister. And, but for Shawblack, they might have been man and wife.

The effect of Reggie's story on the respective minds of Lord Slatering and Mr Spraggs differed considerably. Lord Slatering regarded the matter as a mere youthful indiscretion, though he was sorry for Reggie. Mr Spraggs, on the other hand, was deeply mortified to hear of his old friend's and brother parson's sin. He had had both an affection and a respect for Mr Lister. The affection might remain, but the respect was gone for ever. As for Reggie, the shock caused by the discovery of his mother's shame, seemed for the time to have deprived him of all powers of reasoning. It was well that Lord Slatering was present to pour oil on the troubled waters.

"My dear fellow, you must not take the matter to heart so. Why, goodness gracious, there is not a family in the kingdom that does not possess some such story. It's like a family ghost, quite fashionable. Besides, who knows? Only about half-a-dozen people, who are sure for the sake of their own honour to keep the story a secret. Not that I should care a rap, if I were in your place, if the matter were published from the house-tops, or in the Society papers. I am sorry for the poor chap upstairs; still, I don't suppose he will care much."

"You think that I ought to tell him?"

"Well, I should leave that job to old Lister. Here he comes! To judge by his looks, Shawblack has already told him everything. I guess that I'll smoke a cigar outside, for I'm not wanted in this scene." And Lord Slatering left the room.

No doubt it is an excellent Sunday-school precept which tells us that our sins are sure to find us out, but it is a pitiful spectacle to see an old man, especially an old clergyman, bowed down with shame for an indiscretion, which occurred over forty years ago. Mr Lister trembled like an aspen leaf as he entered the room; but Maud had slipped her arm through his, and by the simple action let him know that, whatever others might think, she would always be by his side to support him. Indeed, there was a curious contrast between the father and daughter, for while Mr Lister was weighed down by shame, Maud had a half-defiant expression on her face. With the exception of Shawblack, she was the only one of the party who betrayed no embarrassment. Mr Spraggs was the first to break the painful silence.

"This is a sorrowful meeting, Lister. Do you know why I sent for you?"

Maud answered for her father.

"Yes, we do know. My father was never told that he had a son, or he would have looked after

his welfare, as you ought to know, Mr Spraggs. The sorrow is, that he has been kept in ignorance of his son's existence. Perhaps you will now tell me how my brother is."

"The doctor says that he is progressing as well as can be expected, though he is still unconscious. The London doctor will come down again this afternoon, if you would like to see him."

"Of course we should."

"Well, Mr Lister, now that you have discovered Berkeley to be your son, what do you propose to do?" Reggie asked.

"That is the question which I wish to discuss with you."

"In the first place, it is my desire that the memory of my mother should remain untarnished. I presume that you wish the same, and that Berkeley will wish the same."

"I can answer for both of us."

"Then we are agreed on that point. The next question is, do you intend to openly recognise Berkeley as your son?"

"Will it not be best to consult Berkeley?" Maud interposed. "Unless, of course, you mean to openly recognise him as your brother."

"H'm! I have not decided. I only received this news this morning. You can hardly expect me to welcome a stranger as a brother in a

moment, especially when I have every reason to believe that that stranger came down here for the express purpose of conspiring against my interests in Lord Slatering's racing stable."

Reggie looked hard at Maud as he spoke.

"What makes you believe this?" she asked. "Has this man given you the information?" and she pointed at Shawblack.

"Pardon me, Miss Lister, but I wish to make this interview as harmonious as possible. I never saw Mr Shawblack till this morning, so you are wrong in supposing that I have received racing information from him. I may tell you, as I shall certainly tell Berkeley, that as a racing tout you are a distinct failure, for you made a mistake at the beginning of your career by making an enemy of Bavigar."

"What is the meaning of this, Maud?" Mr Lister asked.

"Oh, the meaning is very simple. Mr Herbert is pleased to consider me a lady horsebreaker, and within certain limits his consideration is correct. Berkeley has paid me to ride horses in the hunting-field. Is that dishonest, Mr Herbert? Is it dishonest or dishonourable for the daughter of a country vicar to help her father by making raw young horses into ladies' hunters? I might have been a typewriter or the private secretary to a

noble lord, but I preferred to live with my father and help him. I have done my duty as far as I could. Ask any parishioner in Brotherton village; ask Mr Spraggs, if I have neglected my duties as a clergyman's daughter in my father's parish! And yet you have the impertinence to tell me that I am a racing tout! Now, sir, let me tell you one thing. I do know something about racing, and I am told that you have entered the ranks of gentlemen riders. Every sane man, who possesses the slightest knowledge of the turf, will tell you, that every gentleman rider would sell his grandmother for the price of her coffin. Don't frown, Mr Spraggs, Mr Herbert has insulted me. I admit that a paid menial of Lord Slatering may insult with impunity the daughter of a country vicar, but perhaps the paid menial will explain, what has become of his drunken and felonious guardian. No, I will not stop. You have insulted me, Mr Herbert. You have insulted Berkeley. If Berkeley could have heard you, he would have risen from his bed and thrashed you."

The position was now reversed. Mr Lister stroked Maud's hair. She had been his protector, now he was her protector.

"Mr Herbert, you may insult me, but you must not insult my daughter. You have a right to

insult me, but you have no right to insult a motherless girl."

This was turning the tables with a vengeance. Mr Lister was standing erect. He was no longer a shame-faced old man, but a thorough specimen of a hunting parson of the old school.

"I am sorry, sir," he continued, "that you should have adopted this tone. Your friend or informant, Mr Shawblack, has already insulted me. Insults, I am prepared to meet, and old man though I am, I am prepared to punish them. Apologise, sir, or I will lay my hunting crop over your shoulders."

"Father, don't!" Maud pleaded.

"Keep calm, Lister!" Mr Spraggs interposed.

"Am I likely to keep calm, Spraggs? I came into your house, and you did not even offer me your hand."

Mr Spraggs felt uncomfortable.

"Miss Lister, if I have misconceived your character, I frankly apologise to you. I may have been misinformed. I hope that I have been misinformed. Mr Lister, you may say and do what you like to me, but you must not insult Mr Spraggs. You are an old man and I am a young one, so you are perfectly safe in threatening to horsewhip me. Horsewhip me if you like. It may amuse you and it won't hurt me. Let me tell

you one thing, however. You may be a respectable man now, but you were an egregious cad when you were at Oxford."

"Father, don't!" Maud pleaded again, for the old man had raised his hunting crop. "Mr Herbert, have pity on him. I will do anything which you tell me to do."

Maud advanced towards Reggie and would have fallen on her knees, if Reggie had not taken her clasped hands in his.

CHAPTER XVIII

EARTHS ARE DRAWN

THE scene was interesting and might have had a melodramatic finish, if Lord Slatering had not suddenly entered the room.

"Sorry to intrude, Spraggs, but the London doctor has just arrived with the local poison-killer, to hold what they call a consultation. They look as grave as a pair of oysters, which have just been opened. They are in your study now, conversing with your estimable and ancient housekeeper. It appears that Foster has recovered consciousness."

"I will see the doctors. I want to know, if I can see my son."

"Ask the doctors, Mr Lister, when they come down. I left them in the study, but they were on the point of going upstairs."

"Then I will follow them," and Mr Lister left the room.

Lord Slatering came like a beam of sunshine.

"Well, Spraggs, you are a good old chap. Turned your house into an impromptu hospital. Hang it all, man, I shall have to enlarge the place. Ah! Miss Lister, you were my nurse, and I can never thank you sufficiently for the nursing. Now, I suppose all you people have kissed and made friends, as they say in the story books. Hang me, if I don't write a story book myself. Miss Lister, be my amanuensis?"

"Hadn't I better be your racing tout?"

"By the Lord Harry, I never thought of that. Yes. Excellent idea! But we must not think of these ideas now. Reggie, I am afraid that I interrupted a very interesting family scene. 'Kiss and make friends,' is an excellent motto. Not being a lawyer, I don't pretend to guess what the relationship between you two is. Kiss first, and find out afterwards."

"Shall we?" Reggie asked.

And they did.

Obedience is sublime on certain occasions.

"'That's all Sir Garnet Wolseley,' as Tommy Atkins says. Now, Miss Lister, we must get Berkeley up to my place, and you must come and nurse him. Shawblack, I know all about you; but you come up as well. Now, Spraggs!"

"My lord, I am thinking about the man upstairs."

"The doctors say that he is better, eh?"

"The doctors have said nothing. They could form no opinion, until he recovered consciousness."

It was an anxious time in the sick-room, and it was easy for the visitors to see that the doctors entertained little hope. Berkeley had recovered consciousness, but it was only the last flutter of his vital spark. He looked round inquiringly, till his eyes rested on Reggie, but he evinced no surprise, and only asked faintly:—

"Where am I? Why are you here?"

"You are at Slatering Vicarage. You had as bad a fall as a man could have."

"Ah! I remember now. I jumped into a lane, didn't I?"

"Yes; but don't talk much. I want to talk to you when the doctors have looked at you. Don't feel worried, for my news is not unpleasant."

Berkeley smiled sadly.

"I am past being worried now. My last earth is drawn. Is that you, Maud?"

"Yes, dear. Let the doctors examine you!"

But the doctors knew that any examination was useless.

"He cannot live more than a few minutes," the London specialist whispered to Reggie. "If you have anything to say to him, you had better say it at once."

N

Briefly, but very kindly, Reggie explained to the dying man that he was his half-brother and that Maud was his half-sister. Mr Lister meanwhile stood at the foot of the bed.

"Get a sheet of paper, there's a good fellow, and write at my dictation."

The paper was brought and Berkeley dictated: "I, Berkeley Foster, hereby bequeath all my worldly goods to Maud Lister." With difficulty he signed it. Then he fell back. The end had come. There was one slight convulsion, and Berkeley Foster had drawn his last breath.

"It was a merciful relief," the London doctor said to Reggie some little time afterwards. "He could not have lived more than a few weeks at the most, and must have suffered frightful agony. The old clergyman, Mr Lister, seems to be very bad. I thought at first he would have a stroke. As it is, the shock has made him delirious."

"The shock must have been dreadful for him; but shocks don't kill people, do they?"

"Not often, but they affect the brain, especially if the shock is caused by some memory of the past. I am not inquisitive, Mr Herbert, but I could not help overhearing your conversation with the dead man, and I have heard the ravings of Mr Lister. I need hardly tell you that we doctors regard these ravings as sacred confidences."

"What will be the result in Mr Lister's case?"

"It is impossible to tell at present; but it is not improbable, that he will forget everything that has happened in his life, since he was in love with Berkeley Foster's mother. In that case he would not even recognise Miss Lister."

Let us now "hark forward."

As the doctor had anticipated, Mr Lister's memory for everything that had happened in his life, since he made love to Berkeley's mother, entirely vanished, and he did not even recognise Maud. Of course, he had to retire from Brotherton; but he did not live twelve months. Maud was his devoted nurse, and never left him. His old friend, Mr Spraggs, at her request, read the funeral service over him.

But what is this? Slatering and Penk are *en fête*. The church bells are ringing merrily. The Slatering Hounds have been kennelled in the stables of the Slatering Arms, and the Hunt servants have been refreshed with a substantial breakfast before drawing their first covert, to which they walk with the certainty that they will find their quarry without the assistance of hounds. In fact, they had unanimously come to the conclusion that they would find the stoutest dog-fox, and the best running vixen in the country.

"We won't kill 'em, boys, for their cubs are sure to give us plenty of sport in due time."

This from the huntsman as he entered Slatering Church, for Slatering Church was the fixture, our old friend, Mr Spraggs, and Maud, were the quarry, and the field consisted of all the members and farmers of the Slatering Hunt; and when the quarry broke covert, after being bustled about by the bishop of the diocese, Lord Slatering and Reggie, as officiating huntsman, best man, and giver away of the bride, they were greeted with such a view-halloa! as was never before heard in the Slatering country.

THE END.

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